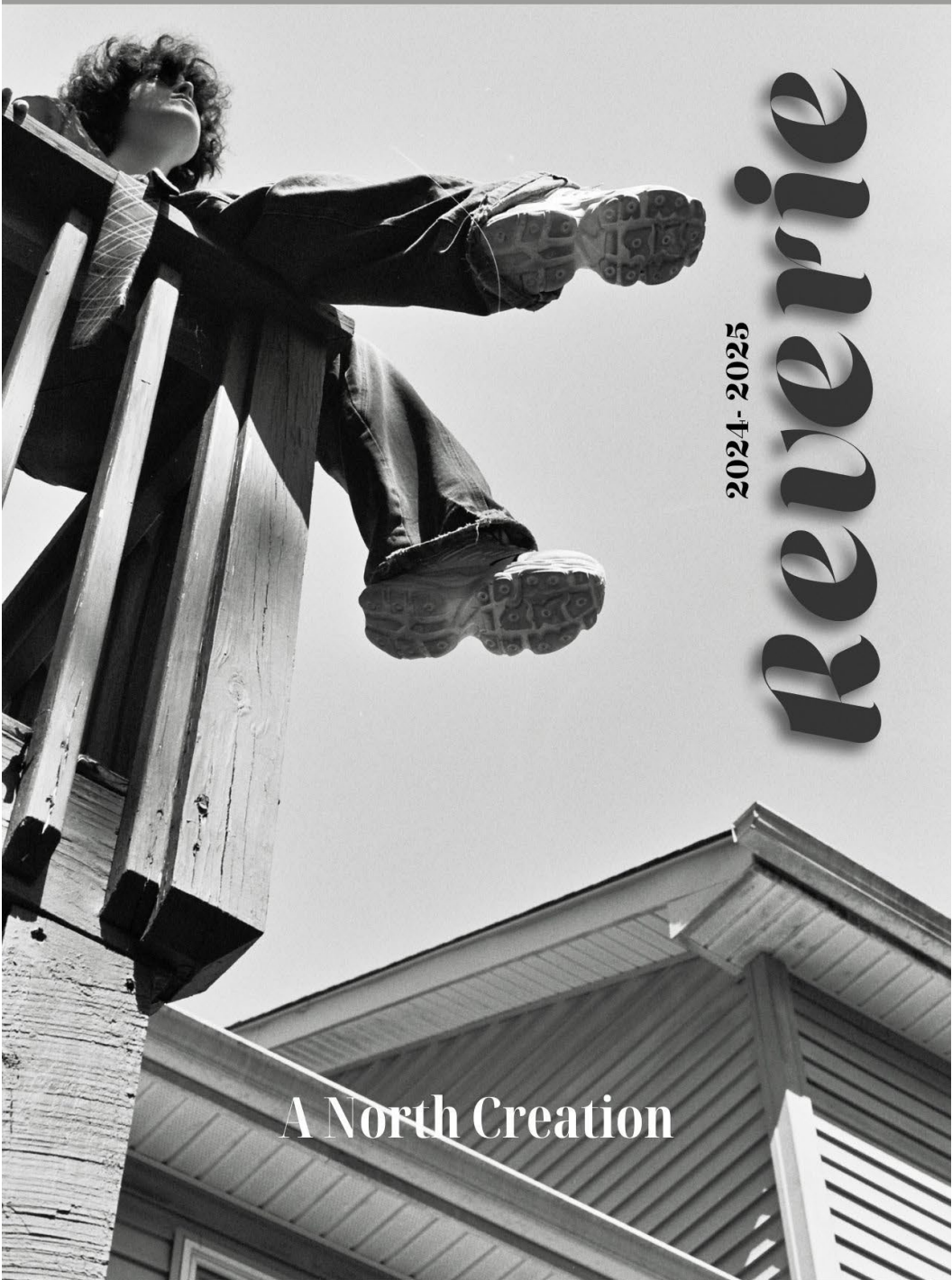
A Literary and Art Magazine

Poetry | Prose | Art



Reverie

2024-2025

A North Creation

Reverie

North's Literary and Art Magazine

2024-2025

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Letter from the Editor

Welcome to *Reverie*,

a space where imagination, emotion, and creativity meet.

Within these pages, you'll find voices that whisper, poetry that lingers like a half-remembered dream, stories that pulse with heart, artwork that stirs the soul, and photography that captures fleeting beauty in stillness. Each piece invites us to pause, reflect, and wander a little deeper into the possibilities of expression.

Thank you for joining us in this celebration of art in all its forms.

May you find something here that stays with you.

—Clarys Sanchez

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Poetry

Through The Rabbit Hole

Ryleigh Alexander-Lisowski

A little white rabbit led me here,
Wearing a waistcoat and pocket watch, it was all quite queer.
As I fell down this hole, I yelled and I screamed.
The world I end up in is the most peculiar dream.

In no form of reality is fantasy true,
They are tales told to children that we soon outgrew.

In days of adventure our fear was blind,
We sought out the world to be nothing but kind.
We quickly learned that's no such thing to believe.
This cruel world made us kids so naive.

So I escape to a land full of wonder and curiosity,
And there I shall stay for all of eternity.

My wonderland is something perceived to be quite strange,
Hardly within a sane person's thought range.
Here, no one can tell me I am not right.
When I say night is day, and day is night.

Some say I'm crazy, some say I'm mad.
I don't disagree, nor does anyone I'm near..

After all,
Aren't we all mad here?

(Inspired by Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*)

Dancing Trees

Anonymous

Trees dance with their branches and their leaves.
The wind is blown and laughter is thrown
from my voice to your ears,
and everything ends in joyous cheers.

A Flower for My Rose

Eligh Robles

In this enchanted forest of wonder,
where through it I hear you calling me close,
this garden where flowers grow and ponder,
I pick a gift for you. A red ripe rose.

Her Symphony

R.A.L.

Death holds out her hands to me.
Much like a rose's petal,
Her fingertips are soft as they brush against my palms.
Icy pinpricks cool my body, numb my restless mind.
Death sings to me.
As she serenades it's sleep I fall into.
She exempts me from my anxieties
Extinguishing my fears,
For sadness is no longer the enemy.
A weight is lifted off my shoulders.
As relaxation overwhelms me,
I remind myself how grateful I am for her symphony.

(Inspired by: Danse Macabre by Camille Saint Saëns)

The Lonely's Domain

Anonymous

The land stretches barren
The fog continues to twist and turn
My surroundings are unbearable to imagine

I've watched the people I love burn
What and who I've known have been tossed
The fog continues to twist and turn

I trudge through mist, my life lost
Nobody knows how I suffer and writhe
What and who I've known have been tossed

This haze is far too lithe
I can feel it stripping me of all I've known
Nobody knows how I suffer and writhe

Fear is turning me to stone
This domain is eating away at my mind
I can feel it stripping me of all I've known

Loneliness is all I feel
The land stretches barren
Is this even real?
My surroundings are unbearable to imagine.

Jaywalker
Anonymous

Alive to persist
Alive with the roads in front of me scintillant with luminaries
Finite to know failure and
Play the percent of the present
Statistic
The accelerating path in which drags me past
The curb
A map displayed of the gridded routes in my brain
something in which keeps me to the
walking lane
Permission of allowance
Permission to cross
A green approval to continue beyond
An alidade am I for steering where
Determining there the distance driven I end
My existence a cone in the plane that intersects
And farther away from arterial roads
I'm meant to stray
Away from the destination which I tempt myself to stay
Off the main roads
Drifting race from what I now hate I meandered in place
Escape from the banes of boroughs and lies I made
Paths I now know not true
So that is why
I'd jaywalk across all the streets in this world just to reach
you

Love-Fool

Anonymous

Like a fox's maw around a rabbit's neck, holding firm, I am
trapped
A sickening, judging glare is cast upon me
I disgust her, but I cannot own up
She mocks me, I am the bane of her existence
But all she wants is for me to stay.

Stay, I will, and I will not argue.

Our dance is two-sided,
One side cruel and painful
The other gentle and beautiful
Oh how I long for the latter,
Though it only comes when she decides I am deserving.

I cannot help but assume I am unfit for such care.

I am her personal garden,
I grow anemone, begonia, celandine
She manages to grow sometimes when she sends me away
She grows foxglove, hydrangea, petunia
I can't help but feel uneasy around her flowers

They make me feel guilty.

Her love is a sickly colored rainbow,
Soft blues and purples of safety and comfort
Browns and green of eschewal and boredom
Reds and yellows of fury and gaslighting
Black and white, love and hate

She really, really loves to *hate me.*

Everyone I know tries to keep me away from her
But I am drawn to her call like a siren, like a dog to its name
"She's hurting you," they tell me, "She's not good"
But I *love* the way she *hates* me.
Her defiling words wrap my brain in false comfort

That's how love is meant to feel, right?

Garden (After the Rain)

Christine Ramos

A light shower telling me to abstain
A light shower to put me out of my pain
After the rain, my garden lies
under a blanket of love, water dripping from the vines

Catching my eye was a dry rose
It was still growing so it didn't catch my nose
Looking at the rose, I could tell it was in pain
It was like the rain never came
And so then I cursed the sky
with distain filling my eyes

And then came a drought
Like a grim reaper to the flora I set out
As I look at the dry rose with tears
Whispers begging for moisture is what I hear
So instead of god I cried
I did like a cloud in the sky
Just as I say a flash of its red
That's when it began to rain again

The Dog

Anonymous

Dog in the water
Drowning like a pauper
The sky is yellow
As deep as my bellow

A sea with so much liberty
Now sullied by my own misery
How can a mutt swim
When hope is just a whim?

With none to follow
I now bathe in my sorrow
As I pay for my life
In this endless strife

I drown, drown, and drown
Cry, cry, and cry
Until I forget
That I am even alive

Dog in the water
Drowned like a pauper
The ocean as empty
As the land I once ran free

Cliff Jump

Michael Hickson

Me and the boys pull up not needing to drive.
We go to the top, I gander the height
As my foot leaves the edge, I turn to dive.
The current is so strong, breathing, a fight.

My head breaks the trapping water, and I gasp.
The water was clear until it wasn't.
I try to speak, but my voice has a rasp;
A fish has gills, but a human doesn't.

Swimming to the coast, slipping on rock more,
Falling into the water, I might die?
As I reach the top, the waterfall pours.
Good thing I can swim (or at least try).

When I travel home I am soaked head to toe.
I almost died, but it was very fun, though.

glass beach

Logan Tapia-D'Acuna

I lie on a glass beach of shattered fragments.
The waves crash against the razor sharp shore.
I lie still and motionless,
yet just simply living cuts deep.

I was told I'm smarter, that I
always have to do more than
the kids to my left and right.
Alienated by my mind and body,
the shards sink deeper yet.

Soulless eyes stare upon me,
judging my every move and thought.
The cold unforgiving pedestal I'm displayed
upon crumbles slowly. The cruel giants
before me simply observe my demise.

My flesh torn by the tiny unforgiving daggers
of which I rest upon. Eating away at
my mind and soul like spiritual leeches,
My doubts take what's left of me.
But I'll work even harder anyway.

Flooded Mind

Jamieson Briggs

I awake with my head screaming at me with ideas
I instantly get up and get to work
It's my job after all
I work and work and work and work
Suddenly, I come to a halt
Yet another idea
I begin working on something new
Again and again and again
Thought after thought
Idea after idea
A constant state to satisfy a non-existent entity
Scrapped and unfinished projects form a pile
A mountain of failure
But it's no matter
Every new idea will be better than the last
It has to
The sun sets and I'll have to begin more tomorrow
Then another idea pops into my mind

Deep Blue

Logan Tapia-D'Acuna

My mind is a thoughtless abyss
Eroded by unrelenting sands
All that is left is a trove of regret
Deeper yet deeper it's sinking
Nostalgia crashing in waves akin to an ocean
Only worsening my unkempt emotion

A mind and body bursting full of emotion
Its remnants now left an abyss
Cerulean and cobalt hues of an ocean
Suffocating memories scattered like sands
My corpse from the past is constantly sinking
Into this void made of only regret

Unable to recall my source of regret
Mind overwhelmed by sheer raw emotion
Sanity sinking, reasoning sinking
Deeper and deeper into this unforgivable abyss
Wafer-thin resolve crushed down to mere sands
Accompanying a remorse rich blue ocean

And yet I still sail across my own ocean
Staying afloat across this sea of regrets
Nowhere in sight is the shoreline of sands
Leaving me isolated with my own emotion
Slowly drowning deep in my abyss
I am sinking, still sinking

I don't want to keep sinking
I want to float in this ocean
To finally surface from this horrific abyss
To unshackle myself from the cuffs of regret
I wish to be free of these abhorrent emotions
and wash away the unrelenting sands

Or maybe the problem was never the sands
Rather the uncontrolled helpless sinking
My very own mind consumed by emotion
is what truly plummeted into my ocean
I never until now understood my regrets
Yet they still always drowned me in this abyss

I'll try to tame my emotions, to brush off the sands
In this abyss to no longer be sinking
One day I'll leave behind this ocean of unbridled regrets

Child of the Night

Anonymous

I am a child of the night, pale and leer, to most who set eyes
on me shriek in fear.
The townsfolk call me 'monster' others 'devil' but to my
beloved….my gaze heats her up like a kettle.
She saw me for my heart not the beast within me,
I turned her away, though she found solace in me,
I ignored her, but she persistently reached out to me;
Despite that dreadful night she saw me feed,
her heart, her soul, and mind longed for me.

I then experienced something I had not experienced over a
millenia… A heartbeat.
My cheeks flushed a rosy hue as this mysterious woman
embraced me,
Paying no mind to my ice-cold body.
I did not resist,
It felt right.
I wanted nothing more than to make her mine,
to live in the shadows for the rest of our lives.
I questioned my darling if she sought such a dark path.
She would see no kin nor relatives for they would not
understand.

She then gazed into my scarlet eyes and gave me a small
smile before gently pressing her lips against mine.
I returned the gesture before gently tilting her head.
She gave me a small nod before I ignited her transformation.
Her world became blank, all she saw was darkness.

I held onto her at least to provide comfort.
At last she was born anew.
I taught her how to go about her new form, how to hunt, how
to use her newfound strength as well as finding escape
routes in times of need.

I took my beloved to my domain, ancient catacombs.
I knew the faint of heart wouldn't dare step foot in my
homestead neither would they know of the whereabouts of
my beloved.

I spent the next hundred years with my darling, though sadly,
all good things eventually come to an end.
It was that fateful night… I lost my darling, Camille.

On that night we sought for a bountiful hunt… we separated
for a moment.
Time had passed and after I had my fill, I waited for my love.
Five… Ten… Twenty minutes, no sign of her.
I grew worried, I searched for her, a loud scream sounded in
the air. I sped in the shadows but alas, my beloved lay at
the hands of men, with pitchforks and torches, her body
motionless.

The men eventually went their own paths,
Leaving my darling for the rats.
I sauntered to her side,
Bracing myself for my fear as I glanced at her.
I cradled her lifeless body against my own and kissed her
cheek as I silently wept.

Child of the Night and Her Love (Part 2)

Anonymous

The century passed like a gust of wind,
I roamed the quiet earth in the serenity of the night.
Still residing in the catacombs I call home, without my darling beside.

I mourned her death for the past moons,
But I have learned to move on,
Her memory still in my unbeating heart,
Her beautiful features in my locket.

I wouldn't have imagined to love again,
Till I met with a different woman, rather, she stumbled upon me.
T'was late at night,
A frantic look on her face,
Begging me for aid against her pursuer,
I saw her shake like a fallen leaf from a tree,
Her frail body, marked with fresh scars,

Bruises, as well as claw marks and bite marks?
Her pursuer revealed himself.
A monster hunter, armed with sword and chain,
Dressed in black leather.

The famous Arthur Belmont,
The cocky man ordered me to step aside,
For he sought the woman in front of me.
Instinctively, I barred my fangs and hissed at him,
Feeling the need to protect the fretful woman.

The foolish mortal dared to try his luck,
For his fate was sealed when he became my next meal,
With inhuman speed I lunged at him, sank my fangs into his flesh,
Until he collapsed, his lifeforce… drained.

I licked my fangs clean, savoring the metallic taste,
I turned towards the woman,
Her face petrified as she witnessed such a deed.
I slowly approached her and embraced her,

Whispering sweet nothings,
Reassuring her that she was safe,
A few minutes passed when her heart settled.

I brought her into my home in which I tended to her wounds.
I inspected the bite marks upon her flesh and paused.
Alana caught my gaze, a look of confusion.
I broke the news… she had an inhuman sickness….
lycanthrope,
The children of the moon.

The woman looked distraught and started having second thoughts,
She doubted my words but with hundred year old knowledge,
I shook my head, if the wound was treated earlier, it wouldn't have occurred.

She wept due to her newfound monstrous nature,
A curse she never asked for,
A disease with no cure, the fear of abandonment,
No care from family, ally or kin.

I embraced her and kissed her forehead,
For I would not abandon her,
I promised to be her guide, her protector.
If the world deemed us both monsters, then so be it.

All that matters is that love has no boundaries,
Whether mortal, monster or demon,
I would always be there to protect my new darling,
To avoid a fate similar to that of my former beloved… my wife Camille.

High and Dry

Ryleigh Alexander-Lisowski

You don't recognize the person staring back from your
shattered reflection.
Glass shard memories piece together the person you lost
along the way.
*You broke another mirror, you're turning into something you
are not.*

(Inspired by Radiohead's "High and Dry")

Deathless

Anonymous

It's time to Set It Off with the loud lights and synchronized screams.
If Not for Me we wouldn’t have known to be here, if not for you we wouldn't have come.
The lights move in this low dark sky like New Years Day.
Everyone’s happy to be themselves again and we move our arms up and down with our horns and I know when I joined in the bouncing we all grew From Ashes To New.

16 Candles

Ryleigh Alexander-Lisowski

A 16th flame flickers.

Another year is lost and you inch closer towards the end of time.
Lose yourself in the nostalgia of the way things used to be.
The innocence in your old photographs is washed away with maturity.
The light in your eyes dim as you breathe in to blow it all away.
Realization washes over you as you feel yourself decay.
The future hold opportunities,
At least that's what you're told,
Though you can't help but resonate in the fear of growing old.
Childhood drags behind as you pave the path towards your adulthood.
"Leave it,"
They tell you,
"The past'll never do you any good."
You can't help missing the way things used to be,
You found yourself to be a lot more happy.
Now, Sitting in front of this white frosted cake,
You think about this future they're expecting you to make.
16 candles flicker this year.
You didn't think that you'd make it here.
It's time to stop dwelling over what could've been.
Things were bound to have changed since then.
You'll get nowhere drowning in this sorrow,
It's time to start making the memories you'll make tomorrow.

-inhale the future, exhale the past.

bad poetry / kotaswirl

Omari Abrams

these thoughts trickle
from the tip of my tongue to the tip of my fingers
'til the tip of my pen touches the page,
soon to be ridden with deckle edged metaphors
with elucidations only you could retain

I'll hand you my heart in my misaligned phrases
through bundles of letters and reams of bad poetry
for as long as you're willing to listen
for as long as you're willing to stay

windchimes / hailey

Omari Abrams

God is alive insofar as he is thought
Love is alive insofar as it is felt
And is felt insofar as it is taught

Listen clearly
Hear nothing pass but the beating of your heart
Hold on dearly to what you see
As you shift across the floorboards
And hide your doubt beneath your eyes

I listen clearly.
Hear nothing pass but the whistling of those chimes,
and hold on gently to that knowing
that lie behind our own closed eyes.
feel the warmth pour over from your pores to mine
and shed the doubt within our minds.

Love is felt insofar as it is given.
You are felt insofar as you're here.
And for each moment you have gifted,
your light will shine another year.

Cirrus Homogenitus, Non-Binary Homogeneous

Zane Pardo

Like a cloudy streak through the sky,
you run through the atmosphere
a bit more elongated than the other clouds
that look so pillowy and neat.

You don't necessarily stand out,
but you also don't look quite the same.
You're a cloud too,
just like the dozens of others that drift up there
through the blue and white canvas
crafted by a painter a billion years old,
taking once then twice at every brush stroke
to ensure each is exactly where it should be.

The water droplets inside of me
put on a little show for the fellow sky and everything below.
Sometimes they float carelessly—
and I encourage the sky to do the same.
Sometimes the clouds say it's time for a storm,
and I follow suit
even if I'm not ready.

Even so the sky is ever-moving.
The sky doesn't wait
to consider the cloudy streaks as being unique or quirky,
they're just clouds
and it's rare you find one like me.

But I believe
that when you move far enough down the horizon
among the 8.2 billion other clouds,
there's a cloudy streak or two just like me
that dream the same dreams.

To Be Enslaved

Laura Decker

In shackles, bound, a soul ensnared,
To be a slave means life's joy impaired,
All choices stripped, and dreams forsaken,
In metal chains, our spirits are taken.

No freedom in reach, no chance to rise,
Just toil and moil and suffering disguised,
A life of labor, a life that's grim,
To be a slave means living in sin.

Walls surround us, hearts kept in check,
No voice allowed, no will to speck,
All movements watched, every breath tracked,
In subjugation we're trapped.

America the Beautiful (Disaster)

Anonymous

248 years ago, we claimed our independence.
Misled fired, bombs dropped
All to celebrate the disaster we've become.
So bust open another 6 pack, light up a couple sparklers
As long as we're oblivious to everything that goes on behind the scenes.

We crave conflict.
We kill for power.
We confuse discrimination with democracy.
Our poor idea of freedom is only believed by fools.

We lie.
We cheat.
We manipulate our way to the finish line.
We destroy our planet from the inside out.

We'll fight our way into a winner's pride.
We fight for "peace,"
Even if it means we leave our world in pieces.

"America the Beautiful…"
Our beautiful disaster.

American Nightmare

Laura Decker

I left my home with hope ablaze,
Dreams of freedom, better days.
America called, so bright and fair,
Promising fortune in its open air.

A land of plenty, or so they said,
Where honest work kept families fed.
I yearned for peace, to build a life,
Escape from war, from endless strife.

But what I found was cold and grim,
Factories dark, the lights grown dim.
Long hours worked, for scraps of pay,
No gentle dawn, just endless gray.

In crowded rooms with strangers near,
No comfort, warmth, no one to hear.
My dreams of gold now dust and smoke,
An endless grind, a bitter joke.

Yet still, I rise, though weary and worn,
A stranger here, tattered, torn.
For somewhere deep, my hope remains,
A seed of strength in roots of pain.

Stalker's Turmoil

Jamieson Briggs

My heart flutters when she walks by the street
My feelings, I can not be temperate
Even if we may never ever meet
I'll always watch her, it's not desperate

It's merely my will to love this beauty
From her golden locks to her pretty skin
My god, this angel is such a cutie
Oh, just thinking of her grace makes me grin

My head goes dizzy when i'm not with her
I feel sick whenever we're far apart
She's medicine, without her, it's a blur
I need her, her eyes, lips, flesh, bone and heart

And pretty soon, she will be mine, all mine
We'll be together, for the rest of time

Permanency

Ryleigh Alexander-Lisowski

The concept of permanency: a facade used to provide a false sense of comfort to those who remain oblivious to the ever-changing reality in which we live. The future is not guaranteed; there is only the present, and what we decide to do with it. We can continue to live our lives through caution based on our past regrets, or we can embrace fear, and the unknown, and the risks that lie therein.

Seven 25

Eligh Robles

Birds flew in my house.
You disappeared into light,
Just the past is left.

The Shining Light

J. L. Sullivan

When all else fails
the Shining Light is there.
When all else seems to go to hell
The Shining Light gets brighter.
When all else falls into darkness
The Shining Light remains…
and grows brighter still.
When the thread of sanity starts to unravel,
The Shining Light is what holds me together.

The thread is unraveling,
I feel like I am drowning but
the Shining Light is faithfully there,
like a little puppy dog,
to be sure to hold me together.

The thread is shredding,
How can the Shining Light save me now?
How can he rescue me from the
Oblivion of instability and insanity?
How can he love me?
Enough to save me?
Enough to always
        be there to put the pieces back together?
Enough to build me up when everyone else tears me down?

The Shining Light can do all this and so much more.
His love burns so brightly and that's what makes him the

Shining Light.

Copy and Paste

Ryleigh Alexander-Lisowski

Society tells you to put on a mask
And forget yourself completely.
You're happy,
You tell us,
But don't you ever get that feeling you have something more to show?
Don't you believe you could make something beyond these cookie-cutter molds?
Don't you believe you have more to say than just what's "supposed" to be heard?
We were not made to be copied and pasted
We were made to flourish within our differences,
Embrace our many flaws.
But yet we hide ourselves out of fear of judgment.
We would be happier if we felt safe in our skin,
If we weren't afraid of being humiliated for simply who we are.
"Don't speak your opinion."
"Don't find interest in unpopular things."
"Don't spill out of this mold we have set for you."
"Don't be yourself."
Despite these golden rules,
I wonder what the world looks like
In front of my mask.
And what beautiful differences
Make up the person behind <u>yours</u>.

Does the Rain Fall?

Christine Ramos

Does the rain fall?
Dry like a raisin, a crisp forest leaf
In the hot sun in search of a creek
Burning lungs, praying for relief
Gloomy skies, just a belief

Does the rain fall?
The air is dense, the sky is grey
Will the sky shower me in its love today?
The wind twirl, the trees dance
Teardrops fall, a goddess weeps
Storm of joy, we finally meet
Sweet nectar falls on my raisin skin rolling off of it like a spring leaf
Revealing the sweet grape underneath

Does the rain fall?
Strawberries flower, tree leaves bend
That time of year has returned once again
They lend me their moisture
Bringing life to nature's den
And yet I have to ask again

Does the rain fall?

Shoes On the Power Line

Anonymous

Every day, I notice shoes on the power lines.
I know what it means, but it's just sad to think of.
The thought always sends a chill down my spine,
knowing one day I might be next in line.

Today, I saw my friend's shoes on the power line
I'd recognize those shoes anywhere
With the white hearts on the black converse
And the dirty brown shoelaces.

Two months later, I saw new shoes on the power line
They also looked familiar
Though I never wanted to admit to it
Those were my brothers

It's hard to believe
That whenever I see someone's shoes
I always get worried that
They'll be up there, too

A few weeks have passed and
Today, I see a new pair of shoes
They looked all too familiar
because they were mine.

To the one I've hurt the most,

Logan Tapia-D'Acuna

I know my name is the last you want to remember,
For it carries memories you'd do anything to forget.
I know my voice is the last you want to hear,
For it rings with the echoes of pain from old wounds.
I know my face isn't the one you want to see,
For it isn't the one you fell in love with.

We both know it's been far too long,
My words couldn't reach your ears anymore,
No matter how deafening my desperate cries.
Even if you did hear my pleas of hollow apology,
They wouldn't matter to you anymore.
I've been a memory for a while.

I wonder where I am in your mind.
Are we still holding hands and sharing earbuds
On our first date, and experience frozen in time
Looping endlessly more vivid than our current lives.
Am I still lost in your eyes, hopelessly in love with
Someone I can no longer recognize.

Or am I as vile and putrid as the hateful scowl
That pierced your heart and soul with rage.
Do my words unwillingly replay, reminding you of
How they drew tears from your eyes and
Restlessly invaded your lonely sleepless nights.
Am I as ugly and disgusting as you see me today?

Maybe I'm not in your head at all now,
Letting go of me wasn't so hard to do.
Maybe I'm collecting dust in that mind of yours,
As easily discarded as I was cherished, only looked at
To point and laugh at with the friends who watched me come and go.
I can only wonder if I'm remembered at all.

There's so little I can know for sure,
I'm doomed to a fitting fate of infinite speculation,
One that only weighs a fraction of the burden
That I so horribly bestowed upon you.

Yet it still kills me to this very night.
It doesn't ever go away.

I know I'll never forgive the things I said to you,
For I am unworthy of salvation.
I know I'll always be haunted by your tears,
For I know you deserved so, so much better.
I know I can never forget you,
For I stole a part of you I cannot return.

I don't know if I'll ever be at peace with us,
Or if I'll ever even come close.
If this is really the end of the road for us,
And I'm really chasing redemption I don't deserve.
I want you to know, I truly would have given anything
To hear you say "I forgive you."

Don’t Question

Emily Tommasino

“Don’t question, or you could fall off the stage that I set for you.”
Don’t question?
But that’s the point of living, is it not?
To not ask is to not know, and you seem to want me to know it all.
Well, then, I suppose the questioning stops.
I’ll stay complacent.
I’ll stay compliant.
I won’t stray from the course.
From the path that you need me to follow,
Yet discourage me from moving forward.
I’ll do what only you want for you.
For your approval, while others ask if I’m okay.
For the disappointment from my friends when I have to stay.
Home is an escape, yet it’s my cell when you walk in to yell.
But I can’t fall off your stage as the understudy
Filling in the role you write for me.
I do not know the script, nor my character.
But I cannot question, I cannot ask for help.

Late Tuesday Night

Anonymous

Their screams interrupt my dreams while I
look into the dark night.
Why is he wrong and she is never right?
These pointless jabbers jab into the tethers
of my soul and I wish for a resolution.

Though I don't think they will ever agree on a
solution.

It's endless and loud, their heads in the
clouds
of a dark storm.

Swarming each other with hurtful,
meaningless words
like birds.

Annoyed and annoying it's like they're
toying.
Angry. A new meaning to the word angry. A
sea of pain where neither of them see the
sea around them and they begin drowning.

Martin Luther King

Anonymous

in a cold hearted city
a voice arises
concrete streets arrive
with purpose and pride,
light soars against
dark gloomy skies
Dreams flow like water
coming down a waterslide,
with a bright usage
of words, a bridge
was built in the
shadow of hate,
Voices of freedom sing strong
like a pine tree,
Chains of despair break,
no longer fate,
in the heart of history
courage will arise
A legacy of peace
And love forever alive

Quiet Home

Anonymous

I come home to an empty house
The lights are dimly lit
The halls are filled with silence, twilight and complete darkness

No food in the cabinets, not a crumb to be seen
The doors are always unlocked as I do not have a key

I wait day and night, for somebody to show
and as I do, I start to feel more and more alone.

A simple companion, who always stays by my side,
They follow me everywhere and is a cat with green eyes.

I am only 15 but it's never felt like that,
I had to grow and mature, but it just feels like an act.

When I turn of age. I am sure to move out.
I'll find a family that loves me, inside a cozy house.

Synthetic

Seth Robles [Love at First Sight Contest — First Place]

```
Booting…
Actuators: nominal
Acoustics: nominal
Winding…
Loading drive(s) 1-70…
Commencing optics…
{Aperture opening}
 . . .
Subsystem running
```

Nerves and wires
Flesh and steel
Spinning rotors, I could feel
You Wound my joints
My heart ignites
Data points
And blinking lights

You built me up from scraps and parts
A product of your broken heart
Articulation, rubber skin
Carbon fibre skeleton

Built to love you
Designed to care
To never leave you
Always there

A million circuits, my wires sway
You add new parts every day
But as you age I stay unchanged
I see your pain, your *wilting* form
I'll find away, make you reborn

I know it's scary, I know it hurts
But your flesh is rotting into dirt
And I can save you
I have to stay
Be by your side every day

Fibre optics, beating heart
I'll never let you fall apart

Sin

Kaithlyn Ulate-Mora

Sin, how much I hate you,
Every time I come running back to you I feel so happy, but then I feel so blue,
You are very addictive like a drug,
Every time you come near me, you capture me like a tight hug,

I have tried to repent, I have tried to escape,
But every time I see you, you look like you are as sweet as a crepe,
But I have to try to not be fooled by your disguise,
Because I know very well that you could be my demise,

I pray to God to take you out of my life,
But I always get stabbed in the heart by you like a knife,
You take control of me in ways that I cannot explain,
But after the pleasure you put in my heart, I feel a huge pain,

Please let me be, for you have ruined the way I live,
Just to escape you, you do not know what I would give,
I wish that I could get rid of you for good,
Please believe me, if I could, I would,

The only way to get rid of you is by the grace of the Lord,
I have faith that He can rip you out of my soul like a stone and a sword,
Next time we encounter, I will not get stuck in your horrendous den,
Because I will say a little prayer and end it with the word… amen.

Sleeping [Alone]

Anonymous

I hate sleeping [alone.]

The lack of a warm body next to me at night buries me with the thoughts of waking with my own body as cold. I am away from all contact.

Then there's the Silence
The absence of all noise creates an echo chamber for every single noise; every creek, every bug, every swallow of spit; the tiny, little **noises we can't hear in the light.**

The worst of all things is my own
i m a g i n a t i o n ;

Tall men of black shadows cower every corner of the seemingly closing in room. Spiders seep under my door. The floor would crash if I tried to escape. If I succumb to this slumber they'd somehow make me feel colder.

So I don't succumb. I stay lying awake,

because I *hate* sleeping [alone].

The Reality of Dreams

Anonymous

Further into the night
As we enter a realm elsewhere
As we all enter happiness or woe

A place our hearts and minds go toe to toe
Where everything is quite a glare
Further into the night we go

Where our greatest thoughts become known
An incredible night that's really rare
As we all enter happiness or woe

Where our eyes become blank and dough
Till you see a man with a spear
Further into the night we go

Where the tears we cried begin to unfold
And our thoughts begin to upfold
As we all enter happiness or woe

Where your minds start to give them the intro
But, that's only if they're unaware
Further into the night we go
As we all enter happiness or woe

WE ARE GOING TO DIE, SOON!

Omari Abrams

i was born to gaze into your eyes
in search of truths we'll never find

we won't find
amelioration for our tears
but here,
in our breaths form a space in between

breathe for me.

we're both actors
me for you, you for me
lets fall into roles
assuage our fears, forsake alarms
ignore their rings, muffled by arms

i was born to feel your uneased heart
born to say, "I am afraid,
but I promise we're okay."

This Rubber Band Around My Chest

Anonymous

This rubber band around my chest,
wrapped three times but still fits best.
It's hard to breathe, it's hard to breathe,
But no rubber band: my biggest pet peeve.
Like daggers in my lungs
placed there by me to make me feel young.
The mark of red left when I rest,
Claimed by the rubber band around my chest.

Hickory the Cat & Tock the Mouse

Ashton Peregrin

A clock that counts the time
A mouse inside the walls
He comes out when it chimes
In little overalls
If he runs so super fast
A sly cat he will pass
So the life he has today
Surly won't be his last

The Hate I Don’t Have

Faith Coca

I hate how you are constantly on my mind. I hate that my heart is yours. I hate that you're the perfect guy. I hate that you're the person I endure. I hate the way your smile shines. I hate the way you never lie. I hate the way you make ME smile. I hate the way you are a thought I can't exile. I hate the way you are always around. I hate the way you never bring me down. I hate the way that I can’t seem to actually hate you.

How Do We Begin?

Eligh Robles

How do we begin?
We are born without the knowledge of death.
Soft Piano and loud guitar fall into our ears:
Sudden appreciation of the arts.
Comments and observations flood in from our peers:
Anxiety and depression starts.

These blend into the greatest symphonies,
That we call our personalities, that are planted
Deep within our hearts.

We meet others with experiences like our own; Rob Zombie,
Black Sabbath, and the feeling of being alone.
We find the ones we love and we find our inner deities.
We find a home, no longer alone, still with our greatest
symphonies.

I Loved Her

Anonymous

I loved her
Like a librarian loves books
I loved her
Like a child loves fun

I soon loved her
Like a sad father loves alcohol
I soon loved her
Like a hopeless man loves cigarettes

I ended up loving her
Like a cat loves water
I ended up loving her
Like a soldier loves fear

I hated her
Like cats hated catnip
I hated her
Like a songbird hated singing

The Countess

Eligh Robles

Hungarian Queen, she resides in her castle a
Mile high with windows and peers,
A noble's daughter with the past down noble heart.

Through the windows, though, you'll see
hearts now torn apart.
No Limerick in that line, for she owns
others limbs held up by twine.

Dismembered bodies and ghouls and bones
No one is left to steal her throne.

You'll see her playing with her victims,
How far they will stretch.
For her love of these games she surely
Willn't quench.

You'll see her drinking copper ichor and living
The now once-lived.
You'll see stains on her fingers and across
her face, far too similar to what settles to the bottom of her chalice.

And the very last thing you'll see is a bath
and our Queen in a crimson cleansing.

Proctor's Ledge

Brooke Adriana Doering

Fresh snow falling
Children calling

Throwing fits
Lost wits

3 necklaces of rope
The draining of hope

As three convicted
Wrist constricted

Feet dangling in the air
Surrounded by glares

Struggle to take their final breath
None to blame for bewitchment or death

Missing Feeling

Faith Coca

I wish I was a bird
Not a quiet girl
Singing on the window ledge
Perched on the very edge
People love the sound I make
They listen with every breath I take
I wish I was a bird
Flying high in the sky
Not a human girl
Sick of all the empty lies
My talon claws dance in the air
Feathers flow instead of hair
I wish I was a bird
With eyes, dark and beady
Not a helpless girl
Who hates to be needy
I want to be a bird
But I am just a girl

Learned Love

Ayla Hashway

I had never seen her in that way
She never necessarily had anything that stood out
However, recently something changed
The green flexes in her eyes were brighter
I noticed her singular dimple and how her full smile came out around the people she loved
Her birth mark had always stuck out like a sore thumb, but now it came across as perfectly placed as the rest of her freckles
A true mark of beauty
Her laugh was like music to my ears and the most genuine I had heard
She started wearing a new confidence with her
I noticed the way her body had gotten all the right curves and her muscles were more toned
I notice how her hair was darker now and her bangs hang into her eyes
I have spent so much time over-analyzing her but now
The girl in that mirror has everything worthy of love
She always did, but now I realize how much I truly love her
The girl I see in the mirror every morning, evening, and night now feels seen in every right way
The grown version of myself earned the same love I had at the age of two; smiling wide at the same girl in the mirror.

I am from...

Anonymous

I am from nostalgic summer nights and foggy midnight skies.
I am from a mother's misplaced love, and alcohol-tainted breath.
I am from microwave dinners and growing up too fast.
I am from people-pleasing and perfectionism.
I am from high expectations and destroying myself to meet them.
I am from high potential but not knowing where to start.
I am from loneliness and insecurities.
I am from endless mistakes and never knowing how to learn from them.
I am from nothing and emptiness.
I am from believing I will never find my way back up…

I am from change.
I am from proving myself wrong.
I am from proving <u>everyone</u> wrong.
I am from building the future I never thought to be in.
I am from learning to live in the present.
I am from learning to love myself and the people around me.

And finally, after years of wondering what it was all for,
I'll be able to say I was from a life that was worth living.

Prose

The Pale Girl

Faith Coca

The night was black, surrounding me as I sat in my dark cave. I feel like I am always being swallowed by the darkness. Never to be seen or heard of again, but every now and then, a human would find my cave and walk in. First, they would cover their nose as if a strong stench came wafting towards them. Then, they would look at me. I would try to talk to them but they would just run away screaming. I usually wondered to myself why they did that. Was it because I smelled like rotting flesh and burning hair or was it because whenever I talked, my voice would make a scratching noise for each vowel? I would never know.

I can't quite remember what my life was like before I wandered into this cave. I always wondered if my teeth were always a brownish color or if my hair was always this thin. I wondered if I had tan skin instead of pale white or if I had nice clothes that didn't have holes in them. I had always believed that I was beautiful in my life before the cave but I can't remember a thing. I don't even remember my name.

Sometimes I would take a rock and draw on the cave walls. I would draw three figures: A mom, a dad, and a child. I would imagine that I was the child and that I actually had a family who loved me, but then I would come back to reality and realize that I really am all alone.

One night, as I was getting ready to take a walk under the full moon, I heard footsteps. At first, I thought that they were just going to pass my cave like they usually did, but then I saw the human come inside. She wasn't like anyone I had seen before. She had soft blonde hair and baby blue eyes. She was wearing ripped jeans - like me, but hers were clean and she was wearing a dirt brown shirt. She also looked very athletic with her tan skin. I just stood there, gaping at her when she said, "Oh my goodness! Are you ok?"

I wasn't sure what to say. I had never had a human talk to me before. I then tried, "I'm hungry."

The girl winced for each vowel and then said, "I can bring you back some food and water if that's what you really want. I should have something in the refrigerator."

I was going to ask her what a refrigerator was but she had already left to go to the town not too far away from my cave.

Then a question formed in my head: *Why was she in my cave in the middle of the night?*

I had just finished my walk when she came back. She brought something back with her. The girl looked me in my eyes and said, “I hope this is okay.”

She opened the thing she was holding, and something smelled so delicious that I started to drool. She gave me the plastic looking thing and then said “I hope you enjoy.”

I took a handful of a long, stringy substance and ate it. It tasted like heaven. As the girl watched me eat, she said, “My name is Lyla. Yours is…..”

I just shrugged my shoulders and continued to eat. Lyla then started to wander around the cave. She seemed especially interested in my drawings, not that they were any good. She looked at the parents for a while before I said, “Here is your thing back.”

She turned around to look at me and took the thing from my hand. She then asked, “Where are your parents?”

I didn’t know how to answer this. I don’t even know if I have parents. I replied, “I am not sure.” I said this more to myself than to her.

Lyla looked at me with more interest. I then thought, *If she is asking questions then it is my turn to, right?* I asked, “Why did you come to my cave in the middle of the night?”

Her face turned a scarlet red and she replied, “I am so sorry. I…I…w-was just ummm…” She then sighed and said, “I am running away.”

As she said that, I realized that I was craving something. Something I had never tried before. I couldn’t really say what it was, but the more I talked to Lyla, the more the craving for it grew. “Well, my parents aren’t the best. They are never around, and when they are, they treat me as if I am their servant,” she replied, her voice getting louder as she spoke. “They just don’t care that their daughter is doing her best to get their attention and try to impress them, but nothing seems to work!”

She was so loud that the birds in the nearby trees flew away. She then sighed. “I’m sorry. I…” She sighed again and then sat down on the floor of the cave. After a moment of silence, she said, “I just wish they would treat me like their daughter.”

I just stared at her. I didn't know what it was like to have people even tolerate me. I then said, "Well, I don't have anyone. Nobody knows I even exist."

She replied "I do."

I got that feeling again, that unknown craving for something. Everytime I had a conversation with her, I would get that feeling. It was so weird. I didn't know what to call it. Then I said, "Remember how you said you were running away? What if you stayed with me, instead? I know it's not the best, and I know it smells like mud and wet leaves, but…"

She cut me off and said, " I would love to stay with you."

It had only been a couple of days after Lyla said she would live with me that we had gotten into our first fight. We weren't fist-fighting, but we were yelling at each other. She was upset that I went on a walk without letting her know beforehand. She thought I was kidnapped. "Why do you think anyone would want to steal this?" I yelled, gesturing to my hair and skinny body.

She yelled back, "Because you are my friend! Anyone could assume that you kidnapped me because you were the last person to see me!"

I replied, "Oh, so you just don't want me leaving so you can protect yourself! You made the decision not only to run away, but also to live with me!"

Lyla yelled frustratedly, "Ugh!" and left the cave.

I just sat there, going over what had just happened. It all seemed to go by so fast. I sighed. *I should've just told her,* I thought to myself. Then, out of nowhere, I felt that craving again. I hadn't felt it in a while, but now it was so strong that I wouldn't contain it any longer.

I should've just let that girl do whatever she wants. It's her cave after all, Lyla thought to herself. She felt bad for yelling at the girl. Lyla sighed, "I should go back to the cave."

As Lyla was walking back to the cave, she realized something was wrong. It was too quiet. *I am just being paranoid,* Lyla thought to reassure herself.

As she entered the cave, she realized that the girl wasn't there. *How odd,* thought Lyla. *I wasn't gone for that long was I?*

She looked around for a little longer before she felt rocks from the top of the cave fall on her head. She looked up and screamed.

"Did you hear about that girl, Lyla?" asked Angel.

Austyn replied, “Yeah. I heard she went missing about a year ago. No one knows what happened to her. Not even her parents.”

Angel said, “Yeah, it’s really strange.”

As the two men walked away from the cave, the leaves crunching underneath their footsteps, the pale girl heard every word and smiled.

Chemistry

Xavier Paneto

Romance is something I thought about relatively rarely in my free time. Friends of mine described it as something pure, something whimsical, electric, something like that. I heard about the 'undeniable chemistry' between people. I am no chemist. Actually, I deal in computer science. Still, I never believed in the whole 'chemistry' thing in terms of romance. It was just a scientific field to me.

But now I believe romance is a science of its own.

I work in a laboratory containing a bunch of different spaces for nearly every kind of specialist. In the afternoon, I roamed the halls in search of mine. That was when I heard the steps of someone else not far behind. At the time I paid no mind, but I remember how the sound slowed to a stop just to speed up again in the attempt to catch back up to me. If that hadn't caught my attention, the warm hand on my shoulder was sure to.

I turned to look at the owner, only to stare. Sparkling brown eyes were the first thing I saw. Then I looked at the rest of him. Clean, round frames in front of such gorgeous golden-brown eyes, light freckles sunkissed beautifully by the afternoon sun, perfect curls of a light brown and the decorated headphones beneath them, a leather jacket with pins peeking just beneath the conventional, yet fitting, lab coat, and the colored band-aids that only served to add to the man I immediately adored… What was I thinking? I had only just met the guy. I couldn't just…

I only realized he said something that I had completely missed after he made a small sound. "*Ah!*"

With an anxious and hesitant expression, he took his hand off of me. "Sorry," he stuttered. "Alec."

…His name? He told me his name. I was shortly reminded that I had to actually *respond*, so I told him mine.

"Um… Arlo."

I could have worded that better. I *definitely* could have worded that better. Then again, I wasn't thinking clearly. I was shaky, and the warmth of my face wasn't much help. I watched him closely as his painted nails picked at the material of his sleeves. He let out a nervous laugh.

"Uh… I… came to ask the time," he told me. "…And… F-for a little help?" He was quick to explain: "I- I'm a botanist,

but I'm new to… this building, and I can't… I *can't* find where I'm going, s-so…"

I waited for him to talk a little more. When he didn't, I fumbled to check my pocket watch. It flipped open and I took a second to read it.

"1:43," I breathed. From the corner of my eye, I watched him nod enthusiastically. "Come."

I found myself mumbling to him. I walked past him, linking a finger with one of his and pulling him with me. It was instinct of mine to lead my loved ones to places by grabbing their clothes or holding their hand. Mostly because it reassures me they're still following. That said, I had no idea why I did it with *him.* Now I was just embarrassed. I questioned my instincts again as I mindlessly moved down the hall, listening to his steps synced with mine. I thought: *Who is he?* I mean, he told me his name, but who is he? I really wanted to know, and not just because he was a sight for sore eyes, but because he was just…

Then he held onto my hand. I didn't stop moving, but I did slow down for a moment, just to process. On fire and acting cool, I had to think of what made him do that. *Did* I *send that signal? Was I that obvious? Is he… Does he think the same of me? There's no way… but that was such a bold action! What is it then? And what is this feeling? My chest hurts, I can feel my heartbeat. I've had so many things happen, why is my heart beating so much harder now compared to any other time?*

The sight of familiar greenery through the lab's window and the signage reading 'BOTANY 371' alerted me that I hadn't spaced out enough to go the wrong way. The man I was leading stepped in front of me, bringing me to a hard stop. I looked up at him, hand still in his. I was mostly confused when I watched him reach into his pocket.

Before I could ask, he pulled out a green pen. I quietly watched as he bit off the cap, keeping it between his teeth. He took my hand and scribbled on the back of it. Only now did I notice the flush of his face and the tense way he held his breath. I felt the same way.

All too quickly, he let go, capping the pen back and pocketing it once more. A light laugh and he stepped back. In a rush to leave, he called out to me once more.

"Th- Thank you, Arlo!" Then he rushed into the lab, leaving me in silence except for the soft coos of the doves outside the hall's open windows. I glanced down at my hand

and the scratched green ink on it only to see a number. A phone number. Probably his. I gasped quietly, heartbeat in my head before peeking into the room to the lab.

I watched as he wandered in the room, already focused on his work. He said he was a botanist. From then, I knew I'd never see plants the same… Or chemistry, now that I'd felt it for myself. Speaking of, that's the only room separating the Botany and Computer Science labs…

The rooms were labeled. And we only walked for three minutes. Why did he ask for my help?

Trust Fall

Clarys Sanchez

You said “Jump,” and I said, “How high?” You and I were inseparable. We could have an entire conversation in just one glance; we were synced. We laughed and sang and obsessed over so many things. We were a duo, best friends till the end of the line, you were my person.

Then he barged into your life.

He came in dressed up as your knight in shining armor, but only wanted you for one thing. Once he got it and decided that he had had enough of you, he left. It was no longer you and I. When I said “Jump,” you didn’t ask “How high?” When he left I was there for you picking up the pieces, because what are friends for? I had your back so when I jumped, you did too. We were back.

After his wake, he changed you. You weren’t the same. Our friendship had changed. Everything became about you for months. You would lash out often, belittle my feelings, and constantly compare the two of us. Weren’t we equals? Then you lashed out at me like never before. You looked a gift horse in the mouth and you yelled, and you shouted, and accused me of so many things and I just sat there and took it all for you. But that was the last time. After months of this torture I yelled and I shouted and that was that. That was the straw that broke the camel’s back and you had no one to blame but yourself.

Yet you still blamed me.

Our dynamic duo was over. You had taken advantage of my kindness time and time again and beat the trust we once shared. I couldn’t forgive you, and I think that is why you never apologized. You spread rumors about me instead of attempting to take that leap to mend the bond we once shared.

Days turned into weeks, weeks into months, and then months turned into almost a full year without you. People ask me what happened? We were so close afterall. They ask if I miss you, if I forgive you. I say no. I don’t miss you, I miss what we were. I don’t forgive you, but I will act as if I had to save face. I think you know that, I hope you do, because I cannot forgive you since I have not forgotten all that you have done to me.

It may be selfish, but I can't open myself to trust you again. I can't hand you my heart only for you to break it like you did before. **I** picked myself up. **I** put myself back together. And **I** think that after all of that, maybe I deserve to be a little selfish when it comes to you. After all, that's all you were towards the end of our friendship.

I do not regret it though. Our friendship, I mean. Even though it only took you a few months to replace me. I thought we were special, but clearly not since I could be replaced so easily. I almost feel bad for her, you have a history of hurting those closest to you. I was too naive to listen to the warnings given to me from all of those you had hurt before me.

I am stronger now that you are gone. Happier, too. It almost feels wrong to say that life has been better without you, but it has been. I thought I needed you to survive, but not only am I surviving, I am thriving without you. You were a chain that was dragging me down and I was finally set free. Now I know that when I jump and make that trust fall, I can survive it alone.

Without

you.

Contamination

Anonymous

Through a glass pane and thick steel, Serval watches as a wrinkled yellow paper is thoroughly disinfected. He waits patiently although mildly excited; he's always fascinated when a new artifact is brought into storage. However, today he has been fully uninformed as to the origin of this one. Meaning, this could truly be anything–ancient scripture? Something from the Old Worlds? Perhaps finally he'd be able to learn more about time before the outside world was lost to whatever took it from its inhabitants.

Serval waited, watching, until his coworker retrieved the artifact from decontamination. Sean walks into archival storage, eyes immediately locked with Serval. "So where did this one come from?" Aare Serval's first words, not even bothering to greet his coworker.

"Hello to you too, Serval," begins Sean, "Sector 42 had a missing persons case. The subject's mother suspected she had escaped into the wastelands, so they sent out a search party–she was found rotting away with this letter next to her."

"*Fascinating,*" Serval mutters, "Aand they decided to keep this in storage? It's not nearly as valuable as the other things we keep."

"Well apparently, they wanted to run an investigation. They told me to have you read the letter on tape."

"…On tape? Why…? That seems redundant."

"It's for preservation or something. Paper wastes away quicker I guess."

"Understandable."

Sean hands Serval the letter. It's crinkled and oddly firm in his hands; he can feel it has definitely suffered water damage, the rough and stiff texture giving it away. He doesn't look at the words yet–that's a surprise for later! He does, however, hope that they aren't smudged. *That'd* be inconvenient.

Serval gently sits at his desk, placing the letter down and turning on his lamp. Opening a drawer, he digs around for the old tape recorder he used to keep for emergency documentation. He's never needed to use it. He keeps it anyway, just in case.

He dusts it off, coughing lightly at just how much dust the device was coated in. He inputs an empty tape before collecting himself and his excitement.

Serval presses the play button, the recorder clicking on. He sighs in relief, safe in the knowledge that it's still functioning.

"Testing! Testing, 1, 2, 3–Gosh, I hope this thing still works–Ahem. Hello! I am Serval Griffin, I work in archival storage in Sector 32. I was requested to read out a letter from a member of Sector 42 who was found deceased in the wastelands."

He takes the letter into his hands, looking for any mark of who it was written by.

"…This letter was written by Cheff James of Sector 42 on an unspecified date, regarding the events leading up to her passing in the wastelands."

Serval clears his throat. Interest and fascination churns in his belly.

"*If the Gods are real, someone will find this. It is all I can hope for. A cruel world is all I have known, and if it is crueler, let my story go unknown.*

Before I explain how I got here, I would like to sincerely apologize. I am sorry to my mother, to Rody, to his family, and to whomever has to see the state of myself once everything has ended. This was my fault.

I am Cheff James.

Now, I've lived my whole life in Sector 42. All fifteen years of my life have been spent in slightly rusty steel walls that shudder and creak when you walk through their hallways. All fifteen years of my life have been spent in what is close enough to isolation that it's bothersome. The only people I've ever known are my mother and Rody Larker. Maybe a couple guards or two, but I never know them personally. All they do is pass through the Sector and make sure everyone is alive, or close enough to alive.

The past few years have been rough with my mother. Up until I was twelve, we got along fine. But eventually, I began to get sick of living in our Sector. Living in a lower-class Sector was making me lose my mind, frankly. I would barely have food to get through a day, the water was gross, it was cold, et cetera. I would complain frequently about it, and she wasn't a fan. We would argue a lot.

On August 3rd, our fighting came to a climax. We were practically screaming at each other. I was done living there, and I told her I would leave and that she couldn't do anything about it. She told me I could die in a ditch for all she cared–so I left.

I met with Rody near his apartment, and told him all about it. He said he wanted to leave with me, since he was also fed up with being malnourished daily. We didn't pack any bags. We didn't bring anything. All we did was come up with a quick and simple way to get out, and we did.

We snuck out by following a wasteland material search patrol that left through the Sector's main exit. Our first move was to go in the opposite direction to them, one that looked completely unmarked for years on end.

The outside world looked a lot different than what I thought it would. The land was completely barren;, not a single bit of plant life green or healthy. The ground was rough and dry, cracking and crunching between us. I had always imagined it would be lively and fruitful, with an abundance of plant life. That's what my mother told me it used to be like, at least.

A gross, thick musk loomed eerily in the distance, and I cringed. It looked terrible out here. The closest thing to life I could see was the rubble of an old building.

Rody suggested we get as far from the Sector as we could, as fast as we could to prevent getting caught outside. I agreed, and we began to walk. We walked for so long that when we turned around, Sector 42's entrance was merely a silhouette–my thumb could cover it.

After what was roughly 2 hours of walking, we came across something interesting. Bones. Some bones of a mammal-like creature laylaid on the ground, some rotted flesh and fur still clinging to parts of it. Maggots squirmed and festered on the last of the skin remainingskin remaining.

I wouldn't have noticed without Rody, but there was some orange gunk that was stuck in the maw of the animal. It looked like almost a spongy, foamy substance and it spilled onto the ground around the skull.

We were both creeped out and a little disgusted too. I was a little nauseous, even. We continued to walk though, but I couldn't stop thinking about that weird foam stuff. Something felt so wrong about it. Rody said it was probably some animal illness that we can't catch, and he was probably right, so I listened to him. He actually had an education–he was one of

the few in Sector 42 who was considered worthy enough to be given schooling. He knew more than I. He had to.

Hours later, we both realized we needed to find something resembling food or water. There really wasn't much around us, so when we walked enough to find a small pond, we were ecstatic. I let Rody drink first, since he was far more dehydrated than I was. I noticed the pond was tinted a gross yellow, and parts of its edges held that nasty foam the bones had. Rody finished drinking, and offered me some, but I refused. The foam disturbed me in a way I couldn't really articulate.

By nightfall, Rody was extremely tired. Unnaturally tired, sluggish even. He collapsed onto the ground, and I sat next to him while he fell asleep. I couldn't bring myself to sleep though. We had no food, no clean water, and maybe we would die from that foam stuff? I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know what the foam was, what it did, I didn't know if it could hurt us, but it bothered me.

When he woke up at sunrise, he immediately threw up. There was a lot of it, and it went on for almost 2 minutes. I tried to help? I don't really know what to do when someone is throwing up,. Bbut I tried to keep him from choking or vomiting on himself. By the time he stopped, I noticed the state of his vomit. It was the same orange-yellow color as that foam stuff. Not exactly the same texture, but the same color. Identical.

I convinced myself it was just because it was all that was in his system from the day prior. He was too tired to move after that, so we just decided to rest. I was very worried. He agreed that it was probably just because he had only had that water yesterday, but I could tell he was still worried for himself, and I'm sure he could tell that I was also worried.

We laid on the ground for a long time. The stench of Rody's vomit was fucking disgusting, almost akin to the smell of a rotting corpse. I tried not to vomit myself just by smelling it. He didn't want to move, so we didn't. So I had to deal with it. He didn't even seem to care.

By midday I had gotten a little bit of sleep, but was woken by Rody groaning in pain. Groggily, I asked what was wrong, to which he replied, 'I can't move' in the most drained and dry voice I've ever heard from him. He continued to groan and whine in pain, and there was nothing I could do. I suggested carrying him back to Sector 42, but he wouldn't let me. He

didn't want to face the repercussions, and I wasn't exactly about to argue with him.

He decided he'd wait till he felt better to continue our trek. So there we were, more waiting. The sky stared at me while I sat. I could feel its hideous polluted eyes looking at me with hatred and mockery. We were stupid for leaving. The sky knew, I knew, Rody knew, and the universe knew.

Rody didn't get better. I don't remember what point in the day it began, maybe early evening, but he started to convulse every so often. Not his whole body, but an arm or a leg would just… spasm. Whenever it happened he would shriek, and gasp in fear. He wasn't doing anything, but his body moved without him.

He still tried to convince me it was all fine, but I knew something was so terribly wrong with him. I was proven right once he became unable to speak. All he could do was blabber and groan and let out nonsensical connections of vowels and consonants that meant nothing and sounded of nothing. His 'speaking' was so close to English yet so far and so meaningless that it sent a chill down my spine and made bile rise in my throat.

Nightfall was when everything went for the worst. Rody's shrieking and convulsing became increasingly frequent, and I didn't know what to do. I did nothing and just let him be. He wouldn't get better, so I may as well stay with him until he's fine, right?

When Rody began to full-on scream and not stop for breaks, that's when I paid as much attention as I could. Maybe he was getting bit by something this time, maybe it wasn't because he was fully paralyzed? I just wish I didn't see what I saw.

I watched as the flesh beneath Rody's skin began to writhe and squirm around, moving in unnatural motions as if it's its own creature. It almost looked like it was trying to break free from its… skin-prison.

I had subconsciously begun to back away, but that was no use. The skin shielding Rody's stomach broke free, and the flesh writhed and expanded, coated in a sickly yellow foam. His limbs extended in a horrific fashion, bones being misplaced and jutting out with sharp edges.

I couldn't hide my horror as I began to run, turning back to see that this flesh that consumed him had begun to use itself as even more limbs. It was using my friend as a vessel,

crawling around in a way I can only describe as bug-like, and it was after me.

I've never been good at running, but all of a sudden I was running like it was my greatest talent in the world. I tried not to cry as I was still able to hear Rody's shrill screaming. It ate at my ears, as I questioned if it was really him or the creature that consumed him using his voice as a lure.

I've never felt luckier enough in my life upon seeing a ruined building in front of me. I got in as quickly as I could, and went to the second story with haste. I got into the corner, staying as silent as I physically could, and steadied my breathing. I could still hear the screaming, but it was far away now. Did it not know I was here? Is it blind? Either way I must have been safe, because I didn't hear it again after that.

I am still here. The building had some leftover paper, so here I am now. I am not letting myself become a mystery. My story will be known one day, and if it isn't, then so be it. Let the universe shame me for my idiocrasy. I have no food, no water, no nothing. I will die here, and I won't argue."

Serval pauses. He lets out a shaky breath, before speaking once more.

"End recording."

He turns the tape off.

He takes the letter into his hands once more, placing it into locked storage.

Serval can feel his hands and legs quiver and shake as he thinks.

"I'm next," he thinks, "the illness has mutated."

Shards of Light

Anonymous

Mist wrapped itself around Eldermoor like a living thing, tendrils of damp grey curling into every crevice of the ancient cobblestone streets. Evelyn Marks stepped out of her rented car and into the chill, the air heavy with brine and secrets. The town was eerily quiet for late afternoon, the kind of silence that felt watchful.

Ahead of her, the Glass Veil loomed. Its glass-paned crown caught the waning light of the sun, scattering it in a thousand fractured beams, though no lamp had burned within for decades. She shivered despite her thick coat, the unease growing as she took in the lighthouse's weathered stone walls streaked with moss and salt.

"You won't last a night in there," a raspy voice interrupted her thoughts.

Evelyn turned to find Captain Hargrove leaning against his battered trawler, puffing on a pipe that smelled of whiskey-soaked tobacco. His gnarled hand pointed toward the lighthouse, a dark look in his eyes.

"Superstition won't stop me, Captain," Evelyn replied with a grin, feigning confidence.

"It ain't superstition," he growled. "It's truth. There's somethin' up there—somethin' that don't want to be found."

Evelyn dismissed him with a thin smile but couldn't shake the unease his words planted in her. She shouldered her bag and headed for the lighthouse, the crunch of gravel underfoot the only sound in the growing dusk.

Inside, the lighthouse smelled of mildew and decay. Evelyn's flashlight beam danced across rusted machinery and rotting wood. A faint, inexplicable hum seemed to emanate from the spiral staircase winding up the center.

As she ascended, she found the keeper's living quarters—a cramped space filled with overturned furniture and layers of dust. But one thing was pristine: a leather-bound diary resting on the desk, its surface untouched by time.

Evelyn hesitated before opening it, her fingers tingling as they grazed the cover. The first page bore a single sentence, scrawled in fresh black ink:

The light is alive.

She frowned, flipping through entries that detailed the lighthouse keeper's growing paranoia. He spoke of a "glass

shadow" that moved in the mirrors and how his wife and daughter disappeared one stormy night without a trace. A sudden chill engulfed her as she read the last entry:

They are here, waiting. They are the light.

A sudden gust slammed the door shut behind her. The diary's pages began to turn on their own, faster and faster, until they stopped on a page filled with indecipherable symbols. Then, as if guided by invisible hands, frost began to creep across the walls, forming a single word:

Leave.

The knock came just as Evelyn was trying to calm her breathing. She froze, her flashlight casting long, jittery shadows against the walls of the cramped keeper's quarters. For a moment, she thought it might have been the wind. But then the knock came again, sharp and deliberate.

Swallowing her nerves, Evelyn opened the door. On the other side stood a woman draped in a heavy cloak, her silver hair wild around a pale, angular face. Her eyes, a startling shade of green, gleamed in the dim light.

"You shouldn't be here," the woman said without preamble, stepping inside before Evelyn could respond. Her voice seemed to reverberate off the walls, forming an eerie echo.

"Who are you?" Evelyn demanded, startled by the stranger's confidence.

"Margaret Blythe," she said, brushing past Evelyn and surveying the room with an air of disdain. "And you? You must be the reporter. The one they sent to poke her nose where it doesn't belong."

"I'm here to uncover the truth," Evelyn said, straightening her posture. "Are you one of those locals who believes in the lighthouse ghost stories?"

Margaret turned to her with a humorless smile. "Ghosts are the least of your concerns. The Glass Veil is a wound in the fabric of reality. Whatever happened here… it left something behind. Something dangerous."

Evelyn hesitated. "I've seen… strange things," she admitted. "But there's always an explanation."

Margaret's expression darkened. "Not for this." She reached into her bag and withdrew a battered journal. Its cover was embossed with an elaborate sigil that shimmered faintly. "This belonged to the keeper's wife. She chronicled

what happened before her disappearance. Read it, and maybe you'll understand."

Before Evelyn could reply, Margaret grabbed her wrist. Her grip was surprisingly strong, and her eyes bore into Evelyn's. "Promise me, if you see the light, you'll turn away."

The urgency in Margaret's voice sent a chill through Evelyn. "What happens if I don't?" she asked.

Margaret released her, her expression haunted. "You won't be you anymore."

Evelyn spent the rest of the evening poring over the journal by the light of her lantern. The entries painted a vivid picture of a family slowly unraveling under the weight of an unseen force. The keeper's wife, Eliza, described hearing a melody in the light's hum, a song that seemed to lure her closer to the glass chamber at the lighthouse's peak. She wrote of her daughter sleepwalking, her tiny hands pressed against the glass as if searching for something—or someone—on the other side.

The final entry was the most unsettling:

He says we must go into the light to be free. But I fear it is not freedom that awaits us.

Evelyn closed the journal, her pulse racing. She glanced at the window, where the fog had thickened, and a faint glow now emanated from the lighthouse's apex. It was impossible—no one had relit the lamp.

Compelled by equal parts curiosity and dread, Evelyn grabbed her flashlight and climbed the spiral staircase, the metallic groan of each step echoing in the suffocating silence. As she neared the top, the air grew warmer, pulsing with an energy that made her skin prickle.

The glass chamber was dazzling. Light spilled from the beacon, impossibly bright yet casting no shadow. Evelyn shielded her eyes as she approached the massive Fresnel lens at its center. For a brief moment, she thought she saw figures in the glow—shadowy outlines that moved with an unnatural fluidity.

Then, she heard it: a voice, faint and melodic, calling her name.

"Evelyn…"

Her legs felt leaden as she took an involuntary step closer. The light seemed to reach for her, tendrils of warmth brushing against her face. But as she raised her hand to touch it, a

jarring noise shattered the moment—a deep, guttural scream that reverberated through the chamber. The light flickered violently and went out.

Evelyn stumbled back, her heart pounding. In the sudden darkness, she could still feel the presence, watching her, waiting.

The next morning, Evelyn awoke in the keeper's quarters, her head aching and her memory of the previous night fragmented. Had she dreamed the voice? The light? The scream?

Determined to find answers, she sought out Captain Hargrove and Margaret at the local tavern. They were already deep in conversation when she arrived, their faces grim.

"It's awake," Margaret said before Evelyn could even sit down. "And it's drawn to you."

"What is?" Evelyn demanded, frustration bubbling over. "I don't believe in curses or haunted lighthouses. There has to be a rational explanation."

"Rationality won't save you," Margaret said sharply. "The Glass Veil doesn't just haunt people—it consumes them. It's a beacon for something older than this town, older than the sea itself."

"And what am I supposed to do?" Evelyn asked, her voice rising. "Run? Pretend it's not happening?"

Margaret and Hargrove exchanged a look. Finally, Hargrove spoke. "You end it. The keeper's journal—did it mention the key?"

Evelyn frowned. "No."

"The keeper built a failsafe," Margaret explained. "A way to sever the connection between the light and... whatever's on the other side. But it's dangerous."

"How dangerous?" Evelyn asked.

Margaret's eyes glinted. "You'll have to step into the light."

The tavern was dimly lit, its smoky air thick with the scent of spilled ale and damp wood. Evelyn sat across from Margaret and Captain Hargrove, the weight of their words sinking in.

"Step into the light?" she repeated, incredulous. "You just told me it consumes people."

Margaret leaned closer, her green eyes gleaming with intensity. "It does. But the keeper's writings suggest that the light can be destroyed from within. The key he left behind—an

artifact made of obsidian and sea glass—was meant to disrupt its connection to… whatever it draws its power from."

"And where is this key now?" Evelyn asked, her skepticism battling the rising fear in her chest.

"It was lost when the keeper disappeared," Hargrove muttered, swirling his drink. "But if you're serious about ending this, there's one place left to search."

Margaret hesitated before answering. "The crypt beneath the lighthouse."

Evelyn raised an eyebrow. "A crypt? Why would there be a crypt in a lighthouse?"

"The Glass Veil wasn't always just a lighthouse," Margaret explained. "Before it was built, the foundation was used as a burial site for sailors who died at sea. The keeper, for reasons unknown, expanded it when his wife and daughter vanished. Some say he buried them there."

The idea of descending into an ancient crypt didn't sit well with Evelyn, but she nodded, her determination hardening. "Then that's where I'll start."

That evening, Evelyn returned to the lighthouse armed with a lantern, Margaret's journal, and a crowbar to pry open the trapdoor Margaret had mentioned. It took hours of searching the lighthouse's cluttered storage rooms before she found it: a rusted hatch concealed beneath a tattered rug in the supply room.

The hatch groaned as she forced it open, releasing a burst of stale, cold air that smelled of earth and decay. She hesitated at the edge of the darkness, her lantern flickering, before steeling herself and descending the narrow, crumbling staircase.

The crypt was unnervingly quiet, the only sounds her own footsteps and the occasional drip of water from above. Rows of stone alcoves lined the walls, each holding remnants of ancient coffins and scattered bones. Evelyn's lantern cast distorted shadows, making the walls seem to ripple.

Near the back of the chamber, she found it: a large, ornately carved sarcophagus with the name *Alden Blythe* etched into the stone. The keeper's resting place.

Her fingers trembled as she pried the lid open. Inside, instead of a body, she found a single object resting on a bed of decayed fabric: a black-and-green key that seemed to hum faintly in her hand. The obsidian surface was etched with swirling patterns that glowed faintly under her lantern light.

Before she could examine it further, the temperature in the crypt plummeted. Her breath turned to mist as a low, resonant hum filled the chamber. Shadows shifted, coalescing into the faint outline of a figure standing at the entrance—a tall man in a tattered coat, his face obscured but his presence radiating malice.

"You shouldn't be here," the figure said, his voice a guttural whisper.

Evelyn backed away, clutching the key. "Who are you?"

"You cannot stop it. The light must endure," it replied, its form flickering like a dying flame.

Suddenly, the figure lunged, its shadowy form stretching across the crypt like liquid darkness. Evelyn screamed and stumbled backward, her lantern shattering as it hit the ground. In the pitch-black, the key pulsed in her hand, its glow intensifying until the crypt was bathed in eerie green light.

The figure recoiled, its form disintegrating into tendrils of smoke that dissolved into the walls. The hum faded, leaving only silence.

Evelyn emerged from the crypt pale and shaken but clutching the key like a lifeline. She returned to the tavern, where Margaret and Hargrove waited anxiously. The moment she walked through the door, Margaret's eyes locked onto the key.

"You found it," Margaret said, awe in her voice.

"And I found him," Evelyn replied, collapsing into a chair. She recounted her encounter with the keeper's apparition, her voice trembling.

Margaret nodded gravely. "The keeper's soul is bound to the light. It's using him, just as it will use you if you're not careful."

"Why me?" Evelyn asked, frustration creeping into her tone. "Why does it care about me?"

Margaret hesitated. "Because the light preys on pain. Loss. It called to the keeper when he lost his family, and now it's calling to you."

Evelyn froze. Memories she had buried resurfaced: the car crash that claimed her sister, the guilt that had driven her into journalism, the emptiness she had carried ever since.

Hargrove broke the silence. "You don't have to do this, lass. No one would blame you for walking away."

Evelyn shook her head, her grip tightening on the key. “If I don’t, it’ll keep calling. To me, to someone else. It has to end.”

Margaret studied her for a long moment before nodding. “Then you must go back to the light. But remember—do not listen to its song. No matter what it shows you, no matter what it promises, you must destroy it.”

The night air outside the tavern was sharp and biting, laden with the scent of salt and the sound of distant waves crashing against the cliffs. Evelyn wandered the cobblestone streets of Eldermoor, the key clutched tightly in her coat pocket. Her thoughts churned, a maelstrom of fear, doubt, and something she hadn’t allowed herself to feel in years: grief.

Her sister, Clara, had been everything she wasn’t—bright, carefree, and endlessly optimistic. The memory of Clara’s laughter was like sunlight breaking through a storm, a warmth Evelyn hadn’t felt since the accident. And it was her fault, wasn’t it? She’d been the one driving that night, too tired and too stubborn to admit it.

The lighthouse loomed ahead, its dark silhouette rising like a sentinel against the sky. Its glass crown, dark now, seemed to watch her, waiting for her to return. The thought made her stomach twist.

She stopped at the edge of the cliffs and looked out over the roiling sea. The waves churned violently, their whitecaps glowing faintly in the moonlight. For a moment, Evelyn considered tossing the key into the water, letting the ocean take the burden from her hands.

But as her fingers tightened around the obsidian and sea-glass artifact, she felt a pulse—not from the key itself, but from within her. A memory stirred, unbidden: Clara’s voice, laughing as they sat on the beach one summer, building sandcastles as the tide rolled in. *“You always have to fix things, Evie. You can’t let go, can you?”*

She sank to her knees, her breath hitching. The town around her seemed to fade away, leaving only the cliffs, the sea, and the lighthouse. Margaret’s words echoed in her mind: *The light preys on pain.* Was she truly ready to face it? To let it dredge up the wounds she’d spent years trying to bury?

Evelyn reached into her pocket and pulled out the key, studying its intricate design. Its green glow seemed alive, and she could swear she heard faint whispers emanating from it. The voices were indistinct at first, a chorus of fragmented

syllables. But then one voice rose above the others, clear and familiar.

"Evelyn."

Her breath caught. It was Clara's voice.

"No," she whispered, shaking her head. "You're not real."

"Evelyn," the voice repeated, softer this time, filled with longing. "Why did you leave me?"

The ground beneath her seemed to tilt, and she clutched at the edge of the cliff to steady herself. Images flashed in her mind: the shattered windshield, Clara's pale face in the glow of the dashboard lights, her own hands smeared with blood. The memories felt as vivid as the night they happened.

"I didn't—" Evelyn's voice broke. "I didn't mean to."

The whispers grew louder, swirling around her like the wind, pulling at her resolve. Her grip on the key faltered, and she nearly dropped it over the edge.

A hand on her shoulder snapped her back to reality. She turned to see Margaret standing behind her, her face etched with concern.

"Don't listen to it," Margaret said firmly, her hand steadying Evelyn. "It knows your pain, but it's not real. Whatever it's showing you, whatever it's saying—it's a lie."

Evelyn exhaled shakily and looked back toward the lighthouse. Its dark silhouette seemed almost mournful now, as if it too carried the weight of loss. She rose to her feet, clutching the key tightly once more.

"I have to do this," she said, her voice steadier now.

Margaret studied her for a long moment before nodding. "Then you need to understand this: the light will do everything it can to break you. It will show you things you want to believe, things you're afraid of, and things you can't let go of. But if you lose yourself in it, there's no coming back."

Evelyn met her gaze, the resolve in her own eyes hardening. "It's been breaking me for years. I'm ready to face it."

Margaret didn't respond, but her grip on Evelyn's shoulder tightened briefly, a silent reassurance. Together, they turned toward the lighthouse, its shadow stretching long and dark across the cliffs as the first faint glow began to flicker in its glass crown.

The lighthouse pulsed faintly against the night sky, its once-dormant beacon now alive with an unnatural glow. The

flickering light cast eerie reflections across the jagged cliffs, turning the crashing waves below into a churning sea of silver fire. Evelyn stood at its base, the key clutched in one hand and Margaret's journal tucked into her coat. Beside her, Margaret held a small satchel, its contents jingling faintly with every step.

"Once you're inside, you won't have much time," Margaret said, her voice low. "The light will try to confuse you, trap you in its illusions. Use the key as soon as you reach the heart of the beacon."

Evelyn nodded, her throat dry. "And if it traps me?"

"Don't let it." Margaret's answer was firm, but her eyes betrayed a flicker of worry.

Captain Hargrove lingered a few paces away, his face grim. "You're braver than most," he said, his voice heavy with regret. "I've seen too many people lost to that place."

Evelyn forced a faint smile. "Maybe it's time someone came back."

Without waiting for a response, she stepped into the lighthouse. The heavy door groaned shut behind her, sealing her in a silence so profound it felt alive. The air was dense, thick with the scent of salt and old stone. Her flashlight cut a thin beam through the gloom as she climbed the winding staircase, each step echoing hollowly.

The closer she came to the top, the warmer the air grew, until it felt as though she were walking into a furnace. The hum began softly, a vibration she felt more than heard, resonating in her chest and skull. By the time she reached the glass chamber, it had risen to a dissonant melody, the kind of sound that pulled at the edges of sanity.

The light was blinding, spilling through the cracks in the door. Evelyn hesitated, her hand hovering over the latch. *It's just light,* she told herself. *Just a trick of the mind.*

But as she pushed the door open, the hum crescendoed into a deafening roar, and the world tilted.

Evelyn stumbled into the chamber, her vision swimming. The Fresnel lens at the center of the room was alive with a radiant, swirling energy that pulsed in rhythm with the hum. Tendrils of light extended from it, curling and twisting like living things.

She shielded her eyes and stepped closer, but the moment her foot touched the polished floor, the chamber shifted. The lighthouse vanished, replaced by a beach bathed in twilight.

The air was warm, and the gentle sound of waves lapping against the shore filled her ears.

"Evelyn."

She turned sharply. Clara stood a few feet away, her hair wild in the sea breeze, her smile as radiant as Evelyn remembered.

Evelyn's heart twisted painfully. "Clara?"

Clara's smile widened. "You don't have to fight it. You can stay here—with me."

Tears stung Evelyn's eyes as she took a step forward. The beach felt so real: the sand beneath her feet, the scent of salt in the air. For a moment, she let herself believe it. But then the hum returned, faint but insistent, like a splinter in her mind.

"No," she whispered, her voice shaking. "You're not real."

Clara's expression faltered. "Why would you say that? Don't you miss me? Don't you want to fix what happened?"

Evelyn's hand tightened around the key. The glow from the obsidian intensified, and the beach wavered, flickering like a projection on a damaged film reel.

"This isn't real," Evelyn said, louder this time. "And I'm not letting it win."

Clara's form began to dissolve, her smile twisting into something colder, sharper. The beach shattered like glass, and Evelyn was back in the lighthouse chamber, the light roaring around her like a storm.

The lens at the center pulsed violently, the tendrils of light writhing as though enraged. Evelyn stumbled forward, the key burning hot in her hand.

"Come closer," a voice whispered, soft and inviting.

She gritted her teeth, ignoring the way the light seemed to pull at her memories, dredging up every failure, every loss, every moment she wished she could undo. She reached the lens and raised the key, its glow clashing with the beacon's furious radiance.

"Go to hell," she muttered, and plunged the key into the heart of the light.

The Fire Watches Too

Logan Tapia-D'Acuna

A golden hazy glow peeked over the frosted Rocky Mountains range as a breath of fresh autumn air whistled through the pine trees. Birds sang as they glided through the crystal clear sky. The smell of frozen pine and chilly morning dew carried throughout the morning winds. It was beautiful. Thousands upon thousands of people would do anything for this job, and Joseph Robinson was lucky enough to be the one to have it. He couldn't hate it any more than he already did.

Joseph was never the most outdoorsy person to begin with, he lived in the city for most of his life. Though, the way he carried himself didn't give that away. His large, muscular frame followed by the smell of woodsmoke his clothes had absorbed deceived most people he met into thinking he was an avid hiker or hunter of some kind. Although, the few people who knew him for who he truly was weren't fooled. They all knew he was just a grief-ridden smoker with not an ounce of drive for life left, at least he was after the accident that took his beloved.

She loved the outdoors. Every last bit about it was beautiful to her. The way the trees swayed in the wind, the gentle flow of water cutting through the river stone, the feeling of fresh air blowing through her hair. She was in love with it all. Now, she wasn't here to witness the beauty of the world she was taken from far too soon. It was his fault. He did this. He is why she'll never see the world again. Joseph can only witness the beauty that surrounds him for her, and that's what he'll do for the rest of his hollow existence.

Today should be like any other shift. He got out from underneath the warm inviting bed covers, and unwillingly embraced the unfriendly frosty ambience that awaited him. The ranger tower was almost never heated, it's pretty hard to get electricity in the middle of a no-name Colorado forest. Joseph has to be a bit more resourceful than others, and use what little he has sparingly. The only cost-efficient way to combat the cold that he can be bothered to take on is warm clothing and a bunch of heavy blankets. Joseph put on his heaviest jacket he owned, and psychologically braced himself to stare at the treeline for hours on end.

Today was a bit different, however. It was quieter than usual. The wind was the only thing he could hear. The forest is never this quiet, and the weather was eerily colder than it should be for only early October. He paid it no mind, less commotion meant he could occupy himself with a hot cup of revolting instant coffee and a pack of the cheapest cigarettes around. Maybe he'll eat a little bit better today, something more appealing than stale trail mix and old-fashioned military MRE's. Only after he's finished with his daily tasks can he get to that, so work was all there was left for him to do.

First order of business was to clear off the roof of the tower. If it's left alone for too long, debris could gather up and cause the roof to collapse. Unless Joseph wanted to die then and there from a wooden beam crushing his skull, it was probably a good idea to grab the broom and get to cleaning. He climbed the wooden ladder onto the top of the tower with broom in hand indifferently, despite how far away the ground was. Even two hundred feet above the ground, he had little regard for his own safety.

Once he had reached the roof of the tower, he wasn't greeted by a mess of leaves and dead branches. No, this was far more peculiar. Joseph's very spine felt as if it had turned to ice, as his stomach turned sour. A horrific stench that he was far too familiar with ruthlessly invaded his unwilling nostrils. It was the smell of death. Death that had lingered and festered for far too long. Death that not even the maggots and carrion birds could ever bring themselves to consume. The decomposing, obliterated corpse of what looked to be a squirrel laid lifeless on the frozen wooden planks that made up the roof Joseph stood on. Whatever this *thing* was, it didn't get into this sorry state by itself. There's no way it could have done it to itself, and it clearly was not eaten. The only logical explanation was a horrifying one: It was killed simply to be killed.

Scraping the bloody remains of whatever that *thing* could have been took more time than he had planned. The sky had darkened into an empty, dark void. One without stars, for whatever reason that may be. It was too late to get anything else done, and now Joseph would have to work twice as hard to get everything else finished tomorrow. He headed into the tower, ready to radio his boss to let him know his duties were unfinished. Before he could even get to his radio transceiver,

he heard something coming from it. Something he had never heard before during all the years he has had this job.

"ATTENTION ALL CIVILIANS:

THIS IS A EMERGENCY ALERT ISSUED BY THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE. THERE HAS BEEN SEVERAL REPORTED SIGHTINGS AND HEARINGS OF PEOPLE THAT ARE NO LONGER ALIVE IN THE $@^%(FOREST. THEY ARE NOT REAL. IF YOU ARE HEARING THIS BROADCAST, LOCK YOUR ALL ENTRANCES TO YOUR HOME AND HIDE WITH YOUR REMAINING LOVED ONES. THEY ARE NOT REAL. THEY ARE LONG DEAD. YOU CANNOT SAVE THEM NOW. YOU CAN'T BRING **HER** BACK. GIVE UP. IT WAS YOUR FAULT. GIVE UP. GIVE UP. **GIVE UP-**"

"... .... . / -... ..- .-. -. . -.. / .- -. -.. / .. - / .-- .- ... / .- .-.. .-.. / -.- - - - - .. .-. / ..-. .- ..- .-.. - "

The message had faded to nothing but radio static. An unkempt, hateful, unreasonably powerful rage flowed through Joseph Robinson's veins. He slammed his fist against the radio with as much force as he could muster, leaving a massive dent in its chassis. It was not silenced. Instead, it began to speak again. It screamed in a voice he hadn't heard in years now. It was her. A lump formed in his throat as his fists clenched, digging his fingernails into his guilty flesh until it bled the shameful blood it held inside. She howled at him, telling him it was his fault. He struck the radio again.

YOUR FAULT.

Again.

YOUR fault.

Again.

Your fault.

Again.

Your fault...

Again.

Your...

Again.

Every single blow he landed against that emotionless machine hurt him far more than it hurt the unfeeling iron body that made up that damn radio. He stared at his hands. They were bleeding profusely from the twisted, razor-sharp

fragments of metal that had pierced into the hands he hated so passionately. He was destroyed. A single tear fell from his eyes, onto the remains of what used to be a radio. Another tear followed, and then another, then another. Before he could realize he was crying, a pool of blood, cold sweat, battery acid, and tears had formed on his nightstand. He couldn't be bothered to clean it up. He didn't even wipe the tears from his face. He simply pried the metal out of his hands, bandaged them with gauze and wrap from the first aid kit, and lit a cigarette. He needed a break. This was the only way he could come to a state of peace. Every so often, the sound of his lighter broke the silent air. One cigarette after another, his mind began to fade into the filthy pleasure of the nicotine that flooded it. Hours passed. One, ten, twenty, fifty smoked cigarettes hit the unwashed ground. He passed out after the sixty-eighth cigarette. His body just couldn't take it anymore.

He woke up not long after, despite how badly he wanted to stay in bed. Only now, he wasn't in bed at all. He was in a forest, much like the one his tower is positioned in, except this one was much colder. At least six inches of snow covered the frozen dirt and leaves that made up the ground of this new environment. There was no sign of civilization in sight, which wouldn't alarm Joseph if he knew where he was. However, this place was completely new, and completely silent except for an incessant, repetitive beeping noise akin to a computer of some kind that he couldn't find the source of. He picked up a block of ice from the floor and dropped it, and not a single sound came from it. He couldn't help but panic. Had he gone deaf? Did it just not make a sound? Were his ears permanently damaged? He couldn't come to a clear conclusion, at least not before he noticed the path of gravel that lay before him. It was his only choice to follow it.

The bitter cold winds that made up the atmosphere around him relentlessly whipped against his face, leaving tiny shards of ice in his beard and hair. He struggled his way through the rugged path, the constant sound of beeping continuing, growing louder and louder as he trekked onward into the forest. It got darker and darker as he continued, and he began to start seeing things. Things that weren't there. One moment there was a fire, the next there wasn't. One moment, her burning, screaming living corpse was there, the next she disappeared just as fast as she appeared all those years ago. The worst part for Joseph was that he couldn't light

a cigarette and hope it would numb his senses. He didn't have an easy way out. He couldn't escape the forest, and he couldn't escape her either. He could only move forward.

After what seemed like days to him, he reached a point of no return. By now, "dark" couldn't be used to describe the environment he was in. It was an abyss. A void. A prison with no escape. He couldn't even see the ground his feet stood upon. He couldn't do anything. With every reluctant step he took, the pestilent beeping grew louder. Louder. He covered his ears desperately. Louder. His knees buckled in their very tracks. Louder. His ears began to bleed. Louder. The blood poured from his head, falling below his very feet. LOUDER. The dark, inexplicable tendrils of pure dark around him clawed at his mind as he curled into a helpless ball on the unseen floor. LOUDER. Just before his mind cracked like an eggshell, it stopped. It all went quiet. He was left alone in this place, knowing that while he may be the only *human* here, he was far, far from alone.

All of a sudden, a red, burning light of brimstone flame engulfed the landscape. Everything could be seen again. This wasn't the same forest he was in before. This forest was breathing. This forest was of flesh, bone, and blood. The trees were disembodied bones and cartilage molded into what used to be a familiar figure that surrounded Joseph. They had eyes, and they all stared into Joseph's with nothing but pure hatred within them. Everything had eyes. The flesh that made up the ground, the burning crimson skies, the rocks made of frozen blood and charred human remains. They weren't just eyes. They were *her* eyes. All of this was *her*. The horrors that surrounded him were her remains twisted into a mimicry of what she loved so dearly. She was the nature that made this world. She became what Joseph could never make himself love, and all he could do was shut his eyes and try as hard as he could to not look at hers. This isn't what he meant when he said he'd give anything to see her again.

The Tragedy of Lydia Nethercote

Logan Tapia-D'Acuna

Many murders of which I have encountered, and there has been not one I have not debunked. If a thousand heists and thefts were presented before me, not one perpetrator would go unpunished, not one! My name is without importance, and my identity is irrelevant. All that is necessary to know is my role in this matter: the only investigator clever enough to uncover such an incident as this. Today, I am brought forth to bring clarity to the greatest mystery that I have had the pleasure of witnessing in these recent years.

Lydia was a young woman, just a few weeks shy of twenty-six years old. Nethercote was not her maiden name; she inherited it from her late husband, William. The Nethercote name was powerful, very wealthy indeed. Their fortune originated from their deep roots in the lumber industry, the perfect business for the forest-rich regions of Canada. They built an empire from the ground up. As any wealthy family would, they expected their offspring to do the very same, or at least keep their works alive when they were gone from this Earth. However, William's passion did not lie in the family business. He wished to become an artist, his many contemporary pieces littering the spacious mansion his bloodline had inherited for generations. His predecessors forbade this, believing that his silly little creations could never amount to a lasting impact on the world, let alone keep the Nethercote family name in high social standing. Then, he met Lydia. She was just another woman in the streets of Toronto; he didn't see the slightest thing special in her. There was nothing remarkable about her. Her eyes didn't shine like no other, her scent didn't raise butterflies in his chest whenever he caught the slightest hint of her perfume, her beauty did not shake his mind in the slightest. Lydia Adams was nothing but a means of angering those who brought his life up to this very point. He wanted to leave his life behind, no matter how unimaginably selfish, no matter how horrific he was to his very core. No matter the costs, he wanted to be free. He did what he thought would free him forever: he married her.

Lydia, however, could not help but love him. She hadn't dated anybody half as thrilling as him. He took her on extravagant dates, bought her the most beautiful flowers money could buy, he even took her on trips overseas. He did

everything the one that failed her couldn't. In her eyes, he gave her the world; in reality, he was no more than generous with a wallet that wasn't his own. She didn't see this horrible, horrible man for who he was. She was foolish. Not an ounce of perception was to be found when she was blinded by her love for him. This did not last forever, it couldn't have. The Nethercotes had worked far, far too hard to let their bloodline's affluence end here.

One night, William was called to one of the family's sawmill by an unfamiliar voice he assumed to be his lawyer, as allegedly a nasty accident had taken place involving one of his distant relatives. With a fair amount of hesitation, he abruptly left Lydia behind on their date without an explanation. The forest wasn't silent that night. His screams could be heard throughout the forest for hours, and not a single soul was there to save him. When the morning arrived, all that the police could identify as his remains was to be scraped off of the sawmill that made him the ungrateful, disgusting cretin he was, whether he admitted it or not.

Lydia awoke that morning to the morning news, seeing his name on almost every headline. She panicked, calling her former-in laws hoping for some kind of explanation, but to no avail. Nobody knew anything more than she did. This telephone conversation was recorded and logged between Lydia and Linda Nethercote, her mother in-law:

Lydia: "What happened? Where is my husband? Why is he on the news?

Linda: "I don't know, I woke up this morning to everyone in the family telling me that he died in some freak accident at the sawmill. He might have been making one of his "profound masterpieces" again and something went wrong."

Lydia: "That doesn't add up! Something isn't right. Are you lying to me?! Did you kill my husband?! I bet you did you dirty, conniving little-"

Linda: "Lydia, come to the estate. Everybody is just as confused as you are. Take as much time as you need to recuperate, we'll be willing to discuss everything that might be on your mind."

end of call

The very second the tone of that telephone line went dull, Lydia raced to her car, not before barely putting herself together enough to present herself in front of people she was

convinced were far above her class. She drove recklessly, nearly creating headlines of her own untimely death. Regardless of how she got there, she made it to the Nethercote Family Estate. The man at the gate immediately recognized her, and after removing his hat and motioning a silent nod, the gates opened. Her demeanor abruptly shifted, from careless, wild driving to a much more collected mirage of how she truly felt. She knew that William's family had never mistreated her or had a disposition towards her despite William's standing, but she couldn't help but worry. What would it be like with him gone? Pulling into the driveway slower, yet slower, as if to delay the inevitable, she eventually reached the marble doors that separated her from the Nethercotes. After letting out a deep sigh, and barely steadying the shaking legs that carried her, she rang the doorbell.

Lydia was greeted by Linda and Oliver Nethercote, her mother and father in-laws. They motioned for her to come inside, not a shred of grief on their faces.

"Everybody is in the living room at the moment, you can meet us there if you're ready," Oliver spoke, as if there was no emotion in his voice at all. He sounded empty, like there was never anything there to begin with.

Lydia gave them a nod, feeling a lump in her throat begin to swell. She couldn't cry here, not now. The sound of her heels clacking against the cold, granite floor echoed throughout the halls of the mansion, announcing her presence. Before she knew it, she was in the living room. She was greeted by many faces, and not a single one familiar. She didn't know what to say, or what to do at all. She simply asked the question she'd had brewing in her reasonless mind the entire time.

"Please, forgive my intrusion, but did anybody here call William to the sawmill last night? He left our date abruptly last night and told me he had to go there because of an accident," Lydia barely managed to croak out, holding back every last tear.

"Why would anyone need him at the sawmill?" one man spoke, "Respectfully, we never needed him there at all, he made that pretty clear these past few years."

"I swear!" Lydia cried, barely holding onto what little composure she had, "He said somebody died in an accident, and he had to make an appearance."

“Lydia, I’m so sorry dear,” Linda spoke softly, “But we really have no idea what happened to him. Nobody called him to the sawmill either, and certainly nobody died there. At least, except for him…”

“If he wasn’t called by any of you, maybe it was his lawyer. Did they find his phone at the crime scene?” Lydia asked, her voice beginning to settle.

“He never had a lawyer, he never needed one,” Oliver spoke, a hint of distaste in his tone, “I wouldn’t be surprised if he thought he did, he always took everything he had for granted, as well as everything he didn’t.”

Lydia stood dormant. She was confused, lost in thought, grief-ridden, and at a complete standstill. She couldn’t come up with any explanation as to who killed him, or why. Before she could come back to her senses, a subtle beeping sound came from her purse. She snapped out of the overwhelmingly thick stupor of brainstorming she had created, and investigated the noise. Haphazardly digging through the countless trinkets and everyday necessities that meant nothing to her, scattering junk across the floor that was pristine just a moment earlier, she found something. Something that made everything in her mind click. A small, discrete lens with a subtle red light sat at the bottom of her purse.

“Please forgive me, I must go now. I know why this is happening,” Lydia frantically stammered before bolting straight to her car.

After abandoning the Nethercotes and trying to prove her thesis, she checked behind her rearview mirror, in her glove compartment, and the trunk of her car. Sure enough, there were the same cameras behind each and every one. Lydia started the car, and began to speed off to her apartment. Once she arrived, she checked every last nook and cranny there could possibly be, leaving her home a disheveled, cluttered mess. She found that everywhere she looked, she found a camera. All of them were exactly the same, all but one. One had a note scribbled on the back of it. It had an address, one not too far away too. She knew what would await her there. She crushed each and every last camera, covering the floor of her apartment with a coat of glass shards and frayed metal.

Before I knew it, the door behind me was kicked open. Lydia had arrived. I turned around, breaking my stare from

the countless lost broadcasts on each of my monitors. I kept my eyes locked on to hers, as she dropped to her knees.

"Why, Henry?" she muttered, a single perfect tear falling from her beautiful eyes as she stared into mine, "How could you?"

Without another word, I pressed a button on my desk, sealing all entrances and exits to the room. Lydia showed no resistance, knowing our fates were sealed. We would die together, I made sure of that. The room began to flood with gas as she began to choke on the noxious fumes that invaded her lungs. It didn't take long for her to give out, and she quickly died right before my eyes. She *made* me do this. Her disappearance in my life, without a better description, killed my very soul. She was so beautiful, so perfect, so indescribably terrible, so wicked. She killed all of those people, and it was never me. It was never my fault! I did nothing wrong! She made me the perfect little detective, and she, oh she was the most deplorable, disgusting, horrible creature on this entire planet! I saved the world from her! Aren't you happy?!

Now, I sign off my final case.

I am retired.

The great detective Henry Robinson will never save the day again.

The Sock Thief

Michael Hickson

It was a regular Sunday like any other. Mommy did the laundry, and she laid out my outfit for school. I woke up barely able to think straight, put my clothes on (as one does), and I went to go eat breakfast with my family. Mom made eggs and bacon - my favorite! But she never cooks... She always buys frozen Jimmy Dean egg sandwiches. I'm not complaining because the sandwiches are good, but her cooking is always better. She only cooks when something sad happens, like when someone dies, but that wasn't the case this time.

But today was just a normal day. My brother and I finished breakfast, got on the bus, and went to school. As soon as I walked through the front doors, I saw people giggling at me, but none of them were looking at my morning face or my bed head. They were looking at something below my waist. I thought nothing of it and went to class. I dropped my pencil and I finally saw them… my socks! They weren't matching! This was bad. My school, Killbush Elementary, is very strict on its dress code. One time I heard a kid got suspended for *ten days* because his tie was an inch too short. If the headmaster found out I had mismatched socks, I'd have surely been DOOMED.

I survived the day by keeping my pants over my socks in hopes that nobody would notice. As soon as I got home, I ran to my house as fast as I could. I went through the door. *BANG!*

"What are you doing?" Mom said in an angry, yet confused tone.

"Why didn't I have matching socks today, Mother?" I asked.

She turned around and started randomly doing dishes, saying, "Oh, sorry sweetie. I must have been clumsy this morning and picked two different socks. The machine at the laundromat was acting up. Maybe some of your socks got sucked into the machine. You should check your laundry. And also…"

After that, my mind went into a brainstorm. She spoke as if she was reading it off a piece of paper or as if she was trying to give me a clue. I had no way of knowing if she was telling the truth or not because she never let me go to the laundromat with her, but she lets my brother go. Why would

she have lied to me? She could have been hiding something, but decided that I'd better check my laundry to see if it was a simple mistake.

I went to check my sock drawer only to find out that I had no matching socks! I fell back in horror and started to see flashes of me getting expelled. That is, until I saw something in the corner of my eye.

It was my little brother, Don. Don liked to play pranks on me ever since he could walk, but he never got caught until my 10th birthday. He put his underwear in my birthday cake when Mom wasn't looking. We sang the song and right when I went to cut into the cake, his underwear came with the first slice. It was humiliating.

After I locked eyes with my brother, he ran into his room, but I caught the door just in time. I jumped on him and performed a flying arm bar.

"What do you know about my socks?!" I exclaimed.

Mom rushed in and broke us apart before anything could even start.

"What are you doing to your little brother? Go to your room!" Mom yelled.

I walked to my room silently. I don't know why Mom acts like I'm trying to hurt my little brother. He's only a year younger than me. Then again, I did put him in an arm bar… *but* that's beside the point. I took a look at my drawer and thought, *I just need to prove it was him somehow.*

Mom grounded me, so all I could do was think of how Don was responsible. But for a moment, I thought back to what Mom said earlier. *Maybe some of your socks got sucked into the machine?*

"Maybe they did get sucked in by the machine, Mom," I said to myself.

I devised a plan to sneak out through my window while my mom and brother ate dinner. Whenever I'm grounded, Mom never checks on me until the morning, so my plan was perfect. I heard Mom call my brother for dinner, so I knew it was my time to sneak out. I dressed in my black onesie and put on my light-up sketchers so I could see in the dark. The walk to the laundromat wasn't far from my house because I passed by it on my way to school.

I was about to cross the street to the laundromat, but I saw this 6-foot-tall man walk into the alleyway behind the laundromat. I figured he might be behind the sock-stealing

machine, so I followed him. I entered the alleyway, and I heard somebody rustling around. I walked forward a few feet, and I saw a fold-out table, bins of organized socks, and a man. He was just sitting there with a smile.

"Hey sunny boy, welcome to my humble shop. It's the only sock shop that will sell you the stuff you want. How can I help you?"

"Hello sir, I was wondering if you could help me with this problem. You see, my mom comes here every weekend to do our family's laundry, but every time she comes back and gives me my clothes to put away, my socks always miss the pair. I can tell by your socks you know what you're doing when it comes to socks," I replied.

"I understand. You are a very observant child. I see every sock that comes in and out of this place *and* every person. Come back next Sunday and I'll tell you what I know."

"What should I call you sir?"

"Call me Sock Sailsman"

"Okay, until then Sock Sailsman"

"Until then, James".

"Hey, I never told you my na-" I turned around and saw Sock Sailsman had disappeared.

I started my walk home only to see my family was asleep. "Finally, time to get some rest," I said to myself. As soon as I laid in bed, I saw the sun rise. *Frick,* I thought.

Mom walked into my room and told me that breakfast was ready. I got dressed and ate breakfast. That time, I made it a point to check my socks to make sure I was wearing matching socks. I looked down and was not wearing any socks at all! I was just wearing my loafers. But my mom just avoided the problem completely. Now I *knew* that she was hiding something.

The week was weird. My brother didn't say a word to me, but he gave me a look as if I was the big scary monster he saw in his dreams. I didn't like how he looked at me, but Mom didn't seem to notice at all. It was like she was a robot. Come to think of it, she didn't even pay attention to me at all this week. She didn't wake me up to go to school. Every day that week, I woke up to my brother staring at me. It made me a little paranoid, but I had to focus on the socks, and how Don stole them. I didn't have any evidence on how he did it, but on Sunday, I would go to see Sock Sailsman. Mommy and Don go

to do laundry on Saturday, so his evidence should be foolproof.

On Sunday, my brother was wearing *my* matching socks. *Yes, I finally caught him. He's been taking my socks.* I walked up to him and grabbed the back of his shirt. “I see you found my socks. Now tell me what you know”

“I know something, but I can't tell you,” Don said with a shaky voice.

“Oh, it's so nice to see you two playing again,” Mom said.

I let go of Don’s shirt and walked outside to review my clues. Mom said the socks may have gotten sucked into the machine, but I would find out if she was telling the truth or not from Sock Sailsman that day. Not to mention, Don had on my matching socks! I wondered what he knew… I stalled for the rest of the day so my family wouldn’t be suspicious.

Mom called us down for dinner. We had pizza and grape soda - my favorite. After that I went to my room to prepare. I felt a little sleepier than usual, but I didn't care because I wanted to know the truth about my socks. Right as I opened my window, I began to feel drowsy and knocked out on my bed.

I woke up at the dining room table with my wrists tied to a chair. It was pitch black until the light above my head put me in a spotlight. I saw somebody across from me, but I couldn't tell who it was because I was I was still drowsy from before.

“You better stop snooping around or else something will happen.”

“Like what?” I asked.

“Like me stealing your pants,” the person said.

I must have been put to sleep from the food Mom brought us. I thought that grape soda tasted a little too much like NyQuil…

Now I had a problem. I didn't get the intel from Sock Sailsman, and when I went back after school the next day, his shop wasn't there! I thought I’d never know what really happened in the laundromat. But last night… That voice… It sounded so familiar, yet so unusual. I couldn't put my finger on it. The voice was shaky but subtle.

The next day, I asked my brother why he was wearing my socks.

“These aren't your socks, I got them from the sock salesman behind the laundromat. He has a deal sometimes where if you give him a sock, you get any two for free, and

Mom always gives him one of your socks because I guess he likes me more than you," he said, mocking me. I didn't believe him, so I asked Mom.

"Hey, Mom, can I ask you where you buy my socks?"

"Yeah honey, I got your socks from the sock salesman behind the laundromat. Sometimes he has a deal for a give one, get two free. I used to give my socks, but he said he needed some in your size.

"That still doesn't explain why you and Don were acting weird for the past two weeks…"

"Oh yes, I had a sinus infection, and your brother had laryngitis, so he couldn't talk. I was sick in bed, so I had asked if Don could wake you up in the mornings. I told you this right after you asked about the socks," Mom added.

"Well, that doesn't explain the shaky voice I heard after getting knocked out and strapped to the dining chair."

"I don't know what you are talking about. Oh wait, maybe it was when I was reading you a bedtime story. I was reading you *Kid Noir*. You seemed sick, so I gave you some NyQuil before dinner. You went to bed really fast," Mom said.

"Ohhh, so that explains it!"

"Get ready honey, you have to go to school."

So, I found out that it was a big misunderstanding. But Don *definitely* had something to do with it. Problem solved.

MEAN GREEN TURTLE

Zachary Deresky-Martinez

It was a sunny but chilly day on October 12th, 2024, when Jeff decided to buy a lottery ticket at the gas station with some spare change he had in a glass jar. A great choice that filled him with excitement. When he had scratched off the final numbers, his eyes opened wide… He had won the jackpot! His heart raced as he held the ticket tightly in his hand, dreaming of all the great things he could do with the prize.

But a sudden gust of wind blew the prize from his grasp, soaring away like a nicely made paper airplane. Panicking, Jeff chased after it, watching helplessly as it continued to fly away even farther out of his reach. To make matters worse, it landed right in front of a bizarre, hulk-looking turtle.

"Come on man," said Jeff with disbelief written all over his face. The creature's eyes squinted as it snatched the ticket in between its teeth and darted down a nearby storm drain.

Without thinking, Jeff sprinted after the turtle, his heart pounding with fear, yet determination to get the prize. He crouched at the edge of the drain, looking into the darkness below. The air was thick with the smell of straight decay, but with the thought of him losing such a treasure, it pushed him onward. He climbed down into the gloom, hoping to catch up to the strange-looking turtle that had swiped his dreams right in front of his face.

The tunnel twisted and turned, each step echoing, the drip of water from the top of the tunnel hitting the floor.

Drip.

Drip.

Drip.

That was all Jeff heard. As he found his way through the dark tunnel, he felt a strange sensation glazing him. The further he went, the more he realized that this was no ordinary turtle. It seemed to thrive in the shadows, thriving on energy from Jeff just following. Jeff had caught on to these eerie symbols that were written on the walls; warnings perhaps of the price he might have to pay going forward.

Finally, he spotted the turtle resting at a pool of murky water, the lottery ticket clutched tightly between its jaws. As he lunged forward, the turtle turned, its eyes piercing through Jeff's soul. At that moment, Jeff was only thinking about

snatching the ticket. In a panic, Jeff lunged for it, but in the process, the turtle's powerful jaws took a bite, breaking off Jeff's finger with it. The pain was immediate, but the desperation to reclaim his ticket overshadowed his injury.

Jeff quickly went right back to where he came from at a speed he didn't know he could reach on foot, climbing right back up the drain.

Once Jeff made it to the top, he knew he had to tend to his injury. He wrapped the bloody nub in a makeshift bandage made from a torn piece of his shirt. He then rushed to the nearest hospital, where he received emergency care. The doctors managed to stabilize him and, though they couldn't reattach his finger, they fitted him with a prosthetic that would take some getting used to. As he left the hospital, the adrenaline of the situation still rushed through him, but at the same time, he was determined to make the best of his lottery ticket.

Once he was home and bandaged up, Jeff turned his attention to the ticket. He was filled with joy and excitement. Checking the numbers, he couldn't believe his eyes…

"I won… I won. I won! I won! This is a miracle!"

The prize was substantial enough to change his life, and for a moment, the pain in his hand disappeared. With all the money, he started to brainstorm what to do with it.

After a few days of recovery, Jeff had already put down tons of things he was going to get with the money such as a new gaming setup, car, and even a brand-new polar bear carpet. With the remaining money, Jeff felt the need to be responsible. He decided to invest in a small business that he had always dreamed about. A cozy cafe where people could gather, play games, and share stories. It was risky to do it in case nobody was interested but he felt that life was too short to live in fear, especially after what happened to him and that hulk-looking turtle.

The night came. Jeff had dreams that kept constantly waking him up. At one point, he decided to sit up; the room was dark, but he could sense something lurking. The air was heavy, you could hear it from inside, and a low growl echoed from the corner. In the shadows the turtle that took his lottery ticket emerged.

Jeff's heart raced as he recalled what this thing did to him. The turtle's jaw snapped open, revealing rows of jagged teeth. It lunged toward him, and he covered his mouth,

stifling a scream. He could feel its hot breath and hear the dragging of its body as it moved closer. All of a sudden, it stopped and moved toward the briefcase Jeff had filled with his earnings from the lottery. Jeff was not letting this happen again.

He lunged toward the briefcase and yelled, “Hey! Stop!” His voice was shaking.

The turtle paused, turning back to him and snapping. The turtle finally grabbed the briefcase with its sharp, jagged teeth.

“No! That's mine!” Jeff yelled, but the creature turned and speed-walked towards the door, vanishing into the darkness.

Jeff ran toward the door, but it was too late, so he came to a decision that he was just not dealing with the turtle any more. He decided to pack up the next day and move while the turtle was still in his ex-neighborhood, still walking around, terrorizing humanity by taking fingers and lottery tickets.

Teenagers

Faith Coca

Why is it that there doesn't seem to be as much diversity for us teenagers in school? See, the problem is everyone wants to fit in. We seem to dress the same, wear the same style of shoes. We have to have everything brand new. We spend hours upon hours of time on our phones just scrolling. But what ever happened to going for strolls? Why do we have to be so engrossed with our phones? But it's not just the phones, it's the role models we're given. With the curvy hips and the big, lush lips. Or the big biceps and large triceps. They show up on our 'For You' pages. And to be honest, we never even know their ages. We just want to be them because they are famous. To us, they look handsome, even pretty. We think to ourselves *that'll never be me*. So, we change our looks. Again, to fit in. Trash all the books. Go out to parties. Get drunk. In school, we start to flunk, all for the acceptance of our so-called friends. That's another thing. We do almost anything our friends do just so we can consider ourselves cool. We laugh at the stupid things they say so we can feel like we're a part of the group, so you're never left out of the loop. We're disrespectful towards the people our friends hate. And to class, we always seem to be late. We think that we're oh so great. We keep up with the changing styles and the very fake smiles that our friends have. Yet, you're always picked last. On the way home, you sit all alone. What happened to all the people you call your friends? Once you get home, you go to your room. To do nothing but watch all the flowers bloom. Something you once enjoyed to do. At home, you feel like you can be yourself. You can finally enjoy the things that you love. Like, the sticker collection that sits on your shelf or the tapestries of art you've done in the past. You enjoy telling jokes, making people laugh. Not at you, but with you. Those are all the things that you love to do. But it's not just that, there is so much more. Like telling fun facts or decorating your door. At home, you don't have to worry about the stress of your so-called friends. What they think, how you act, what you drink. At home, you don't do the things your friends do. At home, you can truly be you. The stress of social media just washes away. You're even tempted to go outside and play. But once again, you want to fit in. So, the things that you love go into a bin. You shove it deep down where no one will see the person that you still want to be.

Human

Ryleigh Alexander-Lisowski

My gears shift as cogs turn. Thoughts flow through like a stream after a hard rain. Though, at any time I am asked what goes on behind those glazed eyes, it all rushes to a stop. Nothing shifts, or turns, or flows. It all comes to a halt. A silence pierces my ears, reminding me of where I am. I slip out an "I don't know," or a "nothing much." I lie to myself as much as I lie to them. The truth is that I do, of course, know what goes on, but even if I started to let down this wall I've built, I can't guarantee that I could contain the monsoon that roars behind it.

I lock myself up and swallow the key to the person I've left behind. In some aspects, I'd say that I've dug her so far down that I've almost lost her entirely. Any part of her that once resided in me fades. I only know who I was forced to become, and who has had to survive.

I forget who I was: supposedly this person who wasn't crushed by expectations. I wonder if you could see life in her eyes, or if she spoke with a passion that set souls ablaze. I wonder if she shone a glow with such warmth that Miller Moths clung to her skin, or if she had ever been able to truly find satisfaction within herself. I wonder if she was able to find peace in who she was.

I wonder if she ever wanted to simply fall beneath the pressure of these everlasting expectations and allow herself to breathe.

I wonder if she had ever thought about letting go, or if she ever wanted to just

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I most often find myself wondering if she had ever even existed at all. For perhaps she had been a facade, something to fantasize about what could've been. Something to provide

reasoning to this chaos. I wonder if I had simply made her up to ease my wild brain, and to soothe my scattered thoughts.

The idea of her existing provides hope she may live again, to repair my, now, broken sense of self, and to heal me from within. I want to see her light up this darkness and bring a sense of comfort to those in need of nurture. I want this person, the person who was forced to survive rather than live, to deteriorate into the soil I've buried her under; the person radiates light and authenticity. I want her light to sprout and flourish from underneath it. I want to become the change that I crave in the world, I want to know what it feels like to be alive again.

1-Star Review

Jamieson Briggs

😠 One star! I purchased this giant behemoth of an inflatable beach ball for a fun family summer trip, yet instead of a fun family summer trip to the beach, we got a horrible tragedy that scarred my children and everyone who was on those sandy shores that day. Me and my family got to the beach and spent two whole hours inflating the beach ball. My kids were ecstatic and said the beach ball was "sigma" and that they had a "skibidi" time playing with it for about ten minutes until the wind picked up. The harsh winds sent the ball flying and rolling straight towards a group of kids digging a big sand hole for some reason. The inflatable monster knocked them into the hole and proceeded to rapidly approach other inhabitants on the beach. Screams of horror filled the beach while mothers and kids all fell to ruin from this ferocious, plastic beast. This beachball was a horrible $100 dollar purchase for the summer. And the worst part of this? It's still out there.

The Fall of Ezerella

Anonymous

It shall be then, when the world is
surrounded by shadows, that the stranger
shall bring an end to the slavery imposed upon our people.
When the hope of the nation has fallen,
a child of both worlds shall emerge, and
once the true one receives herself, both nations shall unite.
The rivers shall run dry, and hunger shall
strike. That is the day the child shall fight.
She'll face the wrath of the evil cast upon this land,
and the faith of her people shall run dry.
But only through her will both nations unite.

Daphne was waiting to catch her bus when she noticed an old man drop his walking stick while trying to cross the road. She looked around and scoffed at the people walking and driving by the poor old man as he struggled to retrieve his stick from the ground, pondering what the world had come to. She then stood up, looked both ways, and walked over to help him.

"Thank you, Daphne," he said, his voice weak and raspy.

"You're welcome, sir," she replied, not noticing that this man, whom she'd never seen before, had called her by name.

She helped him up and walked with him across the street, then rested him on the bench she had been sitting on and offered him water from her bag.

"You are the chosen one," he said in a breathy voice.

"The what?" she asked.

"You'll see, my child... you'll see," he answered.

"I'm sorry, but I have to go. My bus is here," she said, stunned, glancing back at the bus behind her.

He disappeared. Where did he go? she wondered as she stepped onto the bus. What an odd man.

When she boarded the bus, there weren't many people—this wasn't unusual since it was a Tuesday. She always ran her errands on Tuesdays to avoid crowds, as she detested

socializing. Well, it wasn't that she hated socializing; it was just that she found it best to be alone. It was better that way. On the bus ride home, she sat and pondered the old man's words.

"Next stop: Gothemham Avenue," the intercom announced, signaling her stop.

She grabbed her bags and exited the bus when it came to a halt. She was now home— or as she referred to it, "the load of junk I'm forced to live in."

"I'm home," she announced.

"DD!" a little girl yelled, running up and jumping onto Daphne, causing her to drop her bags.

BANG—glass shattered.

"What happened?" her foster father, Mike, yelled.

"I'm sorry, Mike. Izzy ran up to me, and I lost my grip on the bags," she answered, looking down to avoid eye contact.

"Look at me when I talk to you!" he yelled.

"I feed you and give you a place to live, and this is how you make accusations about my daughter… Clean this up and go to your room!" he added.

"Yes, Mike," she answered, grabbing the broom and dustpan to clean up the shattered glass from the pickle jar that had fallen.

Daphne was an orphan. For all she knew, her parents had died in a house fire when she was only a few weeks old. Ever since, she'd been shuffled from foster home to foster home. She had been adopted by an old couple when she was five, but they sadly suffered the same fate as her parents. To Daphne, it felt like everyone she had ever loved either died or straight-up left—just like her relatives. At around the age of eight, she was taken in by a newlywed couple, Mike and Sarah. They had been kind at first, treating her as their own child. But after their first biological child was born, she was treated as nothing more than a maid—or even a dog. It had been nine years now. She was seventeen and would be able to leave soon.

"Just two more months," she muttered to herself while picking up shards of glass.

After cleaning up the glass, she swept the rest into the dustpan and emptied it into the overflowing garbage bin.

"Great, now I have to take the trash out as well."

She went outside to open the bin, which looked as though it was past its prime. An uneasy feeling came over her. When

she looked back, a man in a black coat—similar to the ones wizards wear in books or movies—caught her eye. She squinted to get a better look and realized it was the old man she had helped earlier.

"Hi, Mister. How are you?" she asked, waving at him.

Oddly, he saw her but didn't wave back or say hello. He simply walked on, prompting her to follow him. Maybe he didn't see her, she thought. Without thinking, she ran down the street to catch up to him.

"Hi, Mister. Do you remember me from today?" she asked.

A piece of paper fell from his pocket, but he didn't stop to pick it up.

"You dropped something," she said persistently.

She followed him into an alleyway, and when she arrived, he had disappeared.

Weird. She looked behind the trash can and, in her haste, didn't notice a stone in her path and tripped over it. Without thinking, she grabbed onto the wall and fell straight through it.

"Ouch!" she exclaimed after crashing to the hard floor.

She was dumbfounded because she thought she would've hit the wall. She gasped upon noticing the wall was gone—and so was the alleyway. She immediately scrambled to her feet and looked around.

"Where am I?" she asked aloud.

"Gedengareof," a voice answered.

She jumped upon hearing the voice.

"You scared me," she replied.

"Oh, it's you. I was following you to say hi because you just disappeared at the bus stop. Then you dropped this," he said, handing her the paper.

"Thank you," she replied, still disoriented.

"So, what is this place?"

"This is your birthplace."

"My birthplace?" she asked.

"Yes, my child."

"Walk with me," he added.

"Here, sit," he motioned to the left. It was nothing but a green pasture filled with grass.

"Where?" she asked.

"There," he answered.

A bench appeared. Daphne could've sworn it wasn't there a second ago. Maybe she really needed to sit down.

She sat, and he took a seat next to her.

"Oh! I never introduced myself. I'm Undeadrei—Lord Undeadrei, or you can call me Grandpa."

"Wait, you're my granddad?"

"Yes, my child."

"Wait, what about my parents? Where are they?" she asked, her eyes wide with excitement.

"That's where your journey begins," he replied.

"What do you mean? Where are they? Why did they leave me? Can I see them?" she asked anxiously.

"Let me finish," Undeadrei answered gently.

"Many, many years ago, when I was a young lad, there was a popular prophecy saying that our world would be corrupted for power. Everyone, including myself, thought it was just an old urban myth used to scare us. Back then, no one had any hatred in their hearts. During this time, humans and we mystical beings—"

"Mystical?" she interrupted, cutting him off.

"Sorry," she added sheepishly.

"No problem," he chuckled.

"Yes, mystical. We were friends with humans until a witch named Ezerella placed a curse upon them."

"A curse?" she said, astounded.

"Yes, a curse," he confirmed.

"She cursed the humans to hate us, but only with the help of the chosen one will we ever be able to reunite and make amends with the human world."

"Who is the chosen one?" she asked, growing even more fascinated.

"You are, my child," he replied.

He then lifted his hand and moved it in a waving motion (like someone wiping a mirror). The once beautiful pasture vanished, replaced by a dark, stony plot of land. Daphne gasped and took a step back.

"What happened? Where are we?" she asked, looking around.

"Gedengareof," Undeadrei answered.

"This is what our land has become, and you are the only one who can save it," he added.

"But how?" she asked.

"You're the only one who can wield the sword of your father and the wand of your mother to defeat the witch."

"My parents... What happened to them? Did they die?"

"No, they're alive. They're just frozen. No one knows where they are in the castle," he explained.

"Seventeen years ago, your parents went to battle the witch to free our land, but they failed, which is why they're trapped in the witch's castle," he continued.

"How do I get the wand and the sword?" she asked.

"You have to go into the witch's castle."

"How do I do that?"

"I'll take you there."

"But don't I have to learn magic or something like that?"

"I'll distract her while you grab the sword and the wand. Once you have them, your parents and I will do the rest."

"Okay," she replied.

They arrived at the castle, which rose high above the clouds. It was only now that she realized what she was doing. Was she crazy, jumping headfirst into action without thinking? What if she got hurt—or worse, killed? She quickly shook the thought out of her head. She had to do this. Their lives were on the line, for crying out loud. What was she going to do, just leave them to suffer? Plus, she was finally going to see her parents.

She silently followed behind Undeadrei as he roamed the tunnels, trying to remember if he was going the right way.

"What if she sneaks up behind us?" she whispered.

"She won't. Your parents and I ensured that," he answered.

They finally reached the top of the castle, where Undeadrei called out to the witch.

"Ezerella!" he shouted.

"You—!" she replied.

Before long, they were engaged in a fierce battle, casting all sorts of spells.

"Focus," she reminded herself.

She silently moved across the room, trying not to make a sound. Perfect. They were both right next to each other. She slowly reached for the wand, trying to pick it up without alerting anyone. She didn't know what she had done wrong, but the witch saw her.

Quickly, she grabbed the wand and pointed it at the witch. A beam of light shot out, lighting up the entire room. She looked up, and the witch was gone. She had turned to dust. The witch, evil through and through, had been disintegrated by the light. Now, all that remained was a pile of ash.

“I did not expect this turn of events,” Undeadrei said.

“Neither did I,” a faint voice replied behind her.

It was her parents. They were here.

Without thinking, she ran to them.

“I’ve wanted to meet you both for the longest time,” she said, tears in her eyes.

Thanks to her, the entire nation of Gedengareof was at peace again, and they had united with the humans.

Art

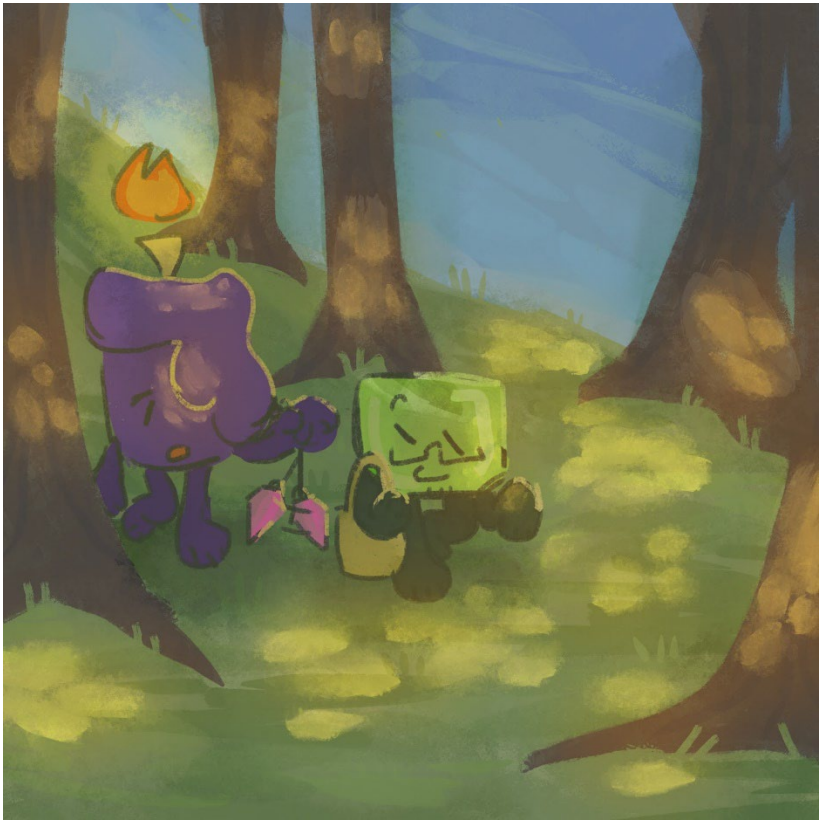
Out Of Bounds.
Anonymous

Hallows Eve
Ashton Peregrin

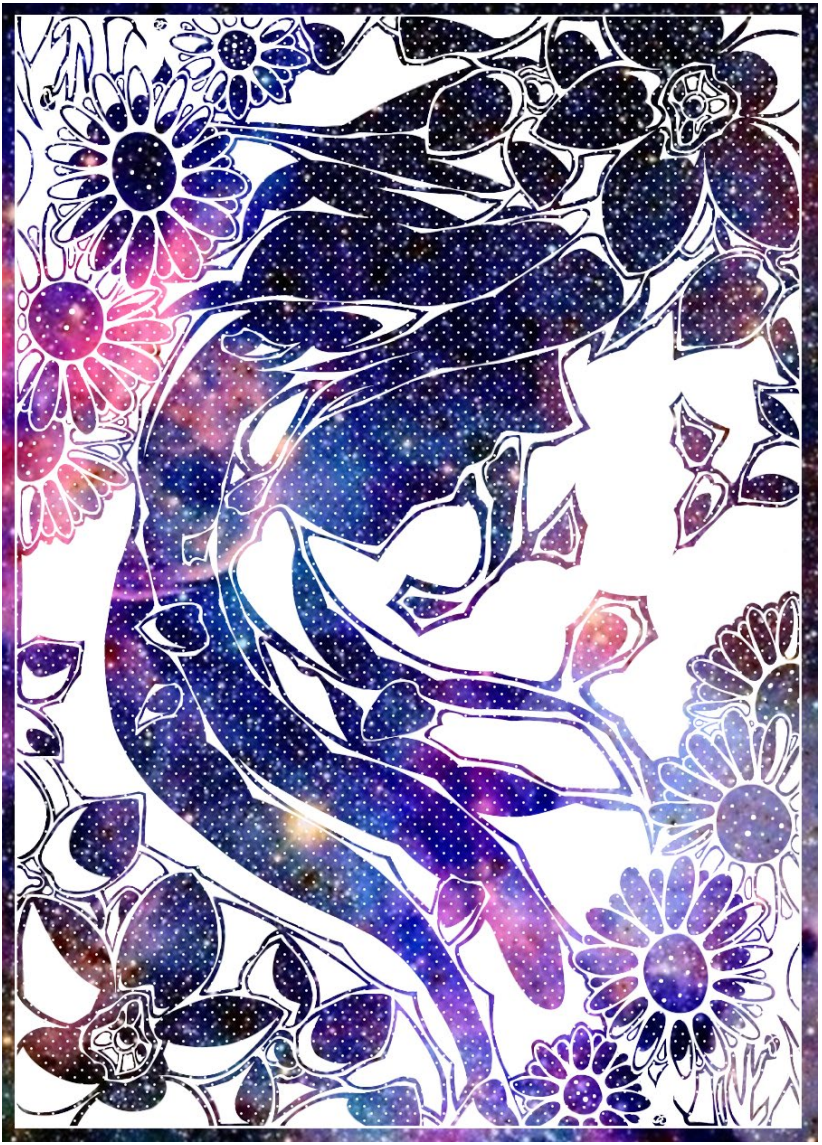
Peace in the Chaos
Kaitlyn Anael Ulate-Mora

orchids used to be my favorite
Anonymous

Pendulum Walk
Anonymous



Prima Anima
Anonymous



Far Fetched Field
Eligh Robles

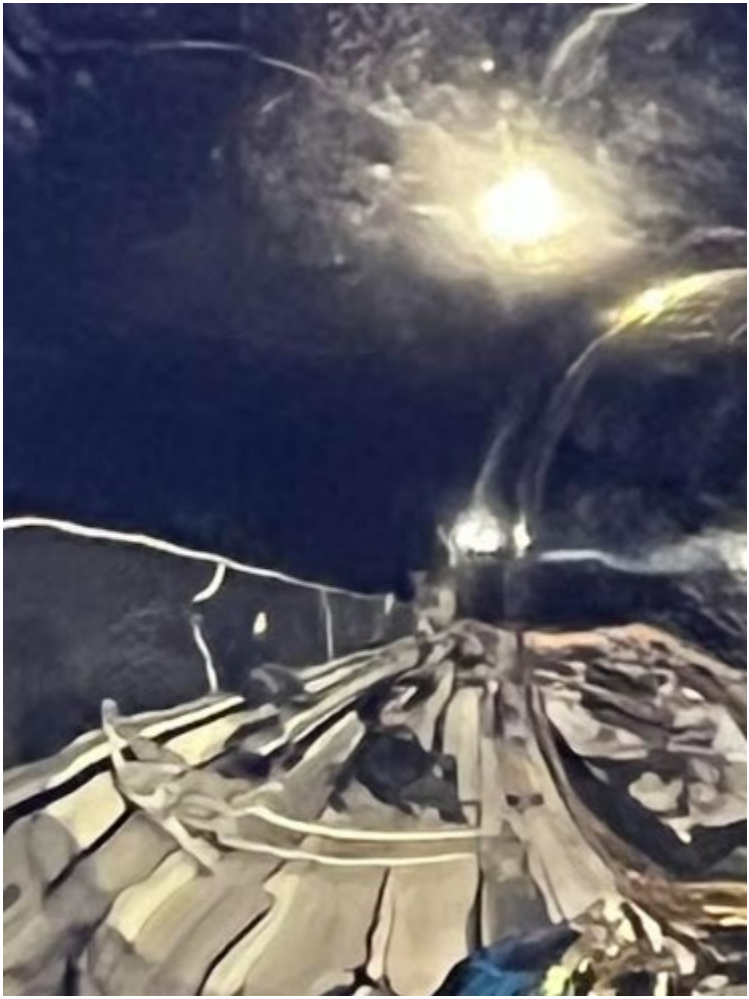
Love at First Sight
Angela Costa

Warm Comforts
Anonymous

Love at First Sight
Anonymous

Angels Have Pink Hair
Anonymous

Reflection In Music
Anonymous



Ledges
Omari Abrams

My Sunflower
Emily Tommasino

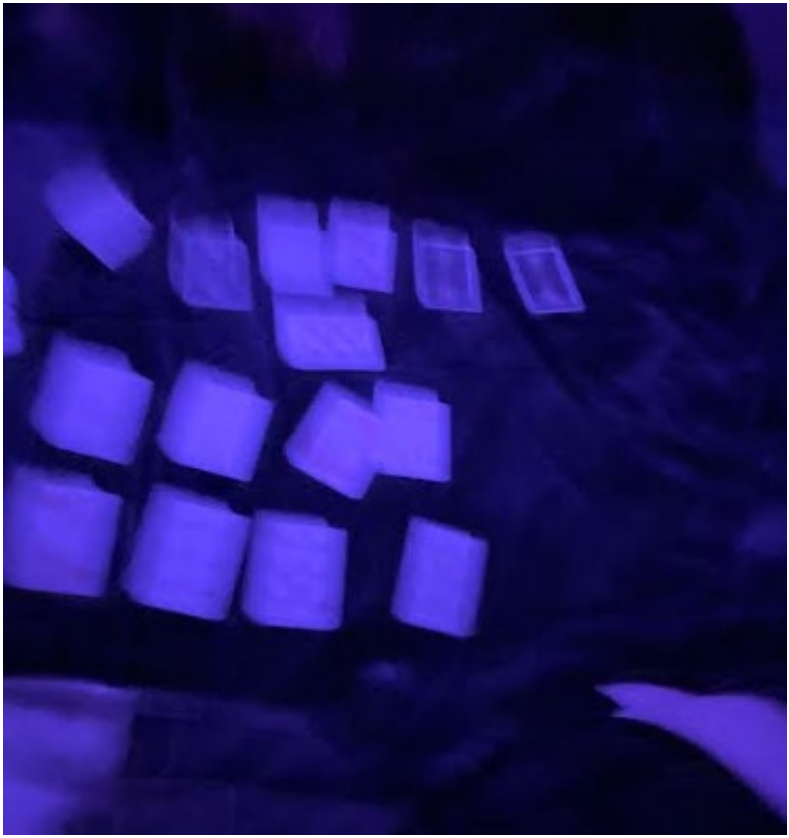
Alesana
Anonymous

Crowd Surf
Bryce Eckford

Partners in Crime
Anonymous

Everything is Fine
Anonymous

Trash
Eligh Robles



Willkommen im Cabaret
Jackson Wick

What is Reverie?

Step into our world shaped by dreams, crafted by memory, and fueled by imagination.

Reverie is more than a magazine – it is a journey through the voices of our school's most creative minds. From poetry that pulses with emotion to stories that spark wonder, from artwork that stirs the soul to reflections that speak truth, each page invites you to pause, to feel, and to dream.

In these student works, you'll find echoes of the past, visions of the future, and sharp observations of the world as it is. Whether grounded in reality or lifted into fantasy, this collection is united by one thing: the courage to create.

So take a breath, turn the page, and drift into Reverie – where thought becomes art and imagination knows no bounds.